



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

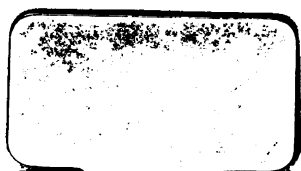
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>







THE KNAVE OF HEARTS.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'THE GARDEN OF EDEN,' 'EVE LESTER,' ETC.

'He Knave of Hearts came middleways in ye Game. He would do us a mischief. For Hearts were trumps, my frendes. But ye thirteenth carde was ye Ace. Out he came, and all was ower with my Lord ye Knave.'

Ye Packs of Cardes—Old Tale, dated 1698.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

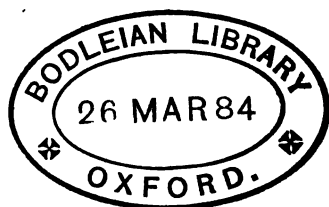


LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1884.

[All Rights Reserved.]

256. e. 167





CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE - - -	1
II. THE DOCTOR'S RETURN - - -	34
III. THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE - - -	73
IV. THE AUNT'S DIARY - - - -	126
V. 'COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE' - - - - -	157
VI. OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE - - -	240
VII. THE NEW LOVE - - - -	314





THE KNAVE OF HEARTS.



CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

MR. NORMAN was in his 'office,' as his room at the end of the long corridor leading to the servants' quarters at Plas Norman was called. It was the room where Wrighton had helped to pack the medical stores that early morning when they were suddenly summoned to Gwyllwch Quarry. The fatal landslip, and the cruel scenes he had witnessed, were growing less oppressive to Mr. Norman.

As he leant back in his green leathern chair, surrounded by his neat bookshelves, his rows of guns and whips upon the wainscoted walls, all his belongings orderly, all the papers and ledgers on his desk neatly arranged to hand when he should have comfortably read his *Times*, and should feel ready to work—he felt calm and almost content.

He was just absorbed in the City article, when there was a quick tap at the door, and before he had said ‘Come in,’ Amy entered.

Mr. Norman was slightly surprised. Amy so rarely came to his sanctum. When she wanted anything, she sent Harman.

‘Well?’ he said, as she came and perched herself on the arm of his chair. ‘What is it?’

Then he looked fondly at the pretty hand with the long taper fingers, which Amy laid caressingly on his arm, and glanced upward at the delicate profile, its beautiful outline defined against the background of his bookshelves. What a dainty creature was this child of his, with that pretty head poised audaciously on her slender throat—with her slim waist and long shapely arms ! Prosaic though he was, Mr. Norman often looked at Amy with a warm sensation of pleasant surprise.

‘ Well,’ he repeated ; ‘ have you outrun your allowance ? Do you want a cheque for some new charitable fad, or what is it ?’

Amy looked round. There was a new expression in her face. A half-shamefaced, half-defiant amusement.

‘Will you have it all at once, or bit by bit?’ she asked.

Mr. Norman, feeling a slight misgiving, although no suspicion of the truth crossed his mind, laid down his *Times*.

‘Something is the matter,’ he said gravely. ‘Tell me—at once.’

Amy bent over and just touched his forehead with her lips. The caress was to Mr. Norman as the whiff of a favourite perfume. He half-closed his eyes, though determining to keep cool and to be firm, not to be cajoled.

‘I don’t exactly know how to begin,’ she said, leaning back and playing with the ribbon bows of her muslin wrapper. ‘But—the truth is—Mr. Wrighton and I have promised to marry each other.’

Mr. Norman started, sprang up, then, adjusting his glasses, stood staring at his

daughter. For the first few moments he felt nothing but a sudden trembling. He supported himself by the mantelpiece. Then he felt outwardly chill, inwardly hot. Then he vaguely realised what had happened. His eyeglass fell from his eye.

‘Tell me everything—do you hear?’ he stammered.

Amy began and told her tale pretty steadily. She did not mince matters in her own regard.

‘It was all my fault,’ she repeated, dwelling almost spitefully upon the fact that *she* had taken the initiative, *she* had ‘put it into Mr. Wrighton’s head.’ ‘In fact,’ she said in conclusion, ‘I made him an offer. He never would have dared to do it—he so poor, and I so rich.’

‘Good God!’ said Mr. Norman in dismay.

Then he paced the room. This was awful. There had been moments in his life—when his wife died—when a favourite friend proved false—when Amy seemed dying of the fever years ago—and lately, when those poor creatures were buried alive at Gwyllwch—that he had bitterly thought himself persecuted by the Almighty, a very Job. But this was disgrace, a disgrace he could never have anticipated.

‘I shall not be angry with *you*,’ he suddenly said, with an impulse of tenderness, looking at Amy, so pretty, fair, and innocent, still poised on the arm of the chair, a bewitching culprit. ‘Poor child! you have no mother!’

He had nearly broken down at the recollection, coming upon this cruel revelation, but rallied himself, and began working him-

self into a rage. He rang the bell, and when Davies quickly appeared in response, he angrily asked for 'Mrs. Harman.'

Harman, who had been to see Amy's *protégé*, the motherless baby, quickly appeared, basket on arm—although she scented mischief and was inwardly perturbed—outwardly pleasantly self-possessed as usual.

'What do you know of all this? What have you been about?'

Harman looked round with an air of bewilderment, cheerfully asking what Mr. Norman meant.

'There must have been some gross neglect of duty on your part, or this never could have happened,' began Mr. Norman wrathfully.

Then he recounted Amy's story, with

bitter anger against Mrs. Harman and Wrighton.

‘Papa, Harman knows nothing about it,’ interrupted Amy. ‘And as for Mr. Wrighton, did I not tell you that it was I that thought of marrying him? If I hadn’t, he never would.’

‘Dear, dear!’ cried Harman, blushing. ‘Miss Amy, don’t talk like that. Of course you want to shield the—the—young gentleman. But that isn’t the way for to go and do it.’

‘Then you know nothing about it?’ asked Mr. Norman sternly.

‘Nothing, sir.’

‘Be so good as to take Miss Norman to her room.’

Harman coaxed Amy out of her father’s study and upstairs into her own room.

There she soothingly persuaded her to sit before a mirror and have her hair brushed.

‘You always did have queer notions, dear, being that alone,’ she said ; ‘but you oughtn’t to keep them to yourself.’

Then she began to brush with a firm yet delicate touch.

To be brushed by Harman was a luxury—a process that was at once soothing yet stimulating. Harman had often brushed Amy from a rebellious, excited state into a congenial mood ; perhaps the accompaniment of cooing talk in Harman’s ‘cheerful voice’ assisted the sedative influence.

‘Yes, dear,’ said Harman, as she brushed, as if continuing a soliloquy ; ‘I knew this was coming all along. I told you as you would have to choose from Lords and Commons one of these days. This is, as

they says, the first attempt. Per'aps you remember, long ago, when you got it into your little head that you wanted to fish? *I* recollect quite well how, when you got your first stickleback, you were that excited that you went and showed it all over the village. But the first day you caught a real big fish you forgot all about that stickleback, and woe betide the person who'd have taken upon himself to remind you of it. Well, this first young man is just about like the stickleback.'

Amy, who had been quietly contemplating her beautiful image in the glass, said, 'It is a good thing Mr. Wrighton cannot hear you.' Still, she laughed.

'Lor', poor young man, as they say, he has my sincerest pity,' went on Harman, clearing the brush and carefully putting

aside the golden hairs (although seemingly quite unconscious, feeling that she had scored *one*). 'But you must have been rather hard on him, dear, to have led him on to forget himself, like.'

'What do you mean?' Amy blushed.

'If you jerk your head like that, dear, your hair'll tangle. Why, you know quite well how a beautiful young lady like you, with ever so much money, as can mate with the best in the land, is no match for an ugly, common, medical student. That's all Mr. Wrighton is——'

'I cannot hear a word against him, Harman. He may be ugly, and poor, and all that, but he is good. And I mean to marry him——'

'Ah, we shall hear a different tale when the doctor comes back.'

‘Dr. Andreos has always helped me in my wishes ; he has never refused me anything.’

‘Not as you knew of, dear.’

‘What do you mean ?’ Amy was growing resentful.

‘I mean that he gave you physic in cakes ; and once, when you had the whooping-cough, and couldn’t take your medicine, and screamed and kicked for strawberry jam, you had your strawberry jam, as you thought, and as I thought. But it wasn’t jam at all, although the pot was a jam-pot and the label all right, and the stuff inside tasted more of strawberries than strawberries do picked warm off the beds in the sunshine. No, it was a mixture of calfs’-foot and cochineal and things that was good for you. The doctor told me that a long time after.

Well, the doctor'll just do that, or something of the sort, now.'

'Will he?' said Amy defiantly. 'We shall see.'

However, Harman had had her say, and knew she had successfully disparaged 'that medical student, who ought to've known better than to have listened to the silly child,' and was satisfied.

Meanwhile, a messenger had gone off post-haste to Dr. Andreos' cottage with Mr. Norman's card, on which was pencilled an imperious, almost rude demand for Wrighton's immediate presence at Plas Norman.

Waiting, Mr. Norman paced his study in agitation. An ordinary father under ordinary circumstances would have thought little of girlish nonsense; would have put

a stop to the foolery in a few words, and would have speedily forgotten all about it. But Mr. Norman was not an ordinary father under ordinary circumstances. Amy meant life to him, his whole life. She was his idol. His morbid passion for his only child was deepened by a morbid fear that she might die. It cost him tortures to refuse her anything.

After she had gone, he stood still. Cold beads were on his forehead.

‘If Andreos were only here!’ he weakly repeated.

Until now he had not known how he had leant on that crooked but sturdy staff all these years. But it was not here now to lean upon. He must continue his path alone, whatever it might be.

‘Only twenty-four hours, thank God, then

it will be all right,' he murmured to himself.

If he were to speak to 'that young scoundrel,' as he felt, he would do harm. The fellow would appeal to Amy's pity, and he knew what that meant. How many pilferers and whining drunkards had she not coaxed him into letting off scot-free! Let those big eyes glance pleadingly at him through tears, and he was 'done'—at their mercy.

'But I don't believe they have that effect upon Andreos,' he thought, still uneasily pacing about. 'Those deformed people can't have affections like other men. It would not be natural or right if they did. No—his devotion to her is admirable, but it is an eccentricity. Eccentricities are harder than affections.'

Mr. Norman was evidently a clever theorist anent human nature and its great exceptions.

By-and-by the door opened, and Davies, in an unconcerned, careless manner, doubtfully announced that Mr. Wrighton had called—as if it were a visit of no moment, at which his master would be bored.

(He considered this the nonchalant manner a family servant should assume when serious interviews affecting the family were imminent, and he had been elaborately rehearsing it in the pantry for the last quarter of an hour.)

‘Where is he?’ Mr. Norman looked furious.

‘I did not know as to where you would wish to see Mr. Wrighton, sir.’

‘Bring him here, along the offices—no—

here, Davies, take him into the dining-room.'

Mr. Norman's first thought was to treat the young man as an inferior, and throughout, to humiliate him. But he felt that after their interview, he might have an unpleasant recollection of his private sanctum. He was fond of that 'office' of his.

Years ago, that lost young wife used to come furtively knocking, and would stay, timidly, hovering about him on the most frivolous pretexts. That fair, gentle creature whose whole life seemed love of him ; who had vanished at the first rude touch of disease, as some tiny flame would be blown out by a breeze. How like, externally, Amy was to that lost darling !

'But Amy is a *Norman*,' he said, shaking

his head as he went to meet Wrighton. And remembering his own youth, and his relations, he felt that to be 'a Norman' meant much. Much sudden impulse, much dogged pertinacity in carrying those impulses out.

Edward had left Amy in a strange frame of mind. He stood in the shrubbery shade, watching her slight figure in the waving dress flit across the lawn. He felt an impulse to rush after her, bring her back, reason with her, show her it could not be—save them both. But in a minute she was gone: the chance was gone—gone for good; for she had told her intention of going at once to her father and telling him—all.

All—*what?* What was the all? That she thought him capable, well-meaning, and that because he had a profession which she

considered as a great factor in the cause of suffering humanity, and because he had no means except his brains and his two hands, she meant to give him herself and her fortune, to augment the usefulness of those brains and those two hands.

He had strolled into the dell, where spreading boughs drooped over the great boulders, and the young ferns were curling up to meet them. The cascade went showering down and splashing into the pool. Leaning his arms upon the rustic fence that bordered that pool, he was bending over, watching the lily-buds peeping out from among the smooth rounded leaves, when he caught sight of the reflection of his own face.

It had never seemed to him so grotesquely ugly. As he saw his squat nose, his small

eyes, his commonplace face freckled and tanned, he gave a grim laugh, and went away with a hopeless sigh up through the shrubbery and through the little gate into the fields.

Here he threw himself down on the grass. The wet blades showered tiny dewdrops on his ears as he buried his face in his coat-sleeve.

‘He will laugh at her!’ he thought. ‘As if anyone would believe a girl like that could care for an ugly fellow like me! Not only ugly, but poor, encumbered with relations. Mr. Norman and the doctor will think her mad, and me a wretch!’ he went on to himself.

Yet how he loved her! As he thought of the sweet flower-face, the starry eyes that looked so true and brave—as he re-

membered her nursing the sick at the quarry, comforting the poor widower in the cottage, lying before him in the lonely road with the holy dead look upon her lifeless face, then pleading so bashfully, but with such tender love, to help him through his hard, rough life—he felt that his love for her beat with his heart and fed his being with his blood, and that it was part of him till that heart should be still and that blood solid in his veins to stir no more !

And he must go away, and leave her for ever—his mind poisoned with a hopeless love ! He felt that this could be the only end. She thought otherwise ; but then she knew as little of life as a baby that stretches its little hands to the stars, and wonders when it cannot pick them off the sky.

His heart seemed growing too big for his

chest. He thought that this was the worst hour of his life. And his trouble was as yet barely born !

There were the soft cloudlets smiling above. Acres of green turf rested his eyes. Soft breezes played among the grass, and went toying with the young leaves. The heifers stood slowly munching, and looking at him with a perplexed gaze. Unconsciously he admired their big, glossy eyes, their sleek brown-and-white sides. He used to feel a strange pity for the brute creation, which lived to feed and serve its tyrant, man. To-day, he envied the lambs that went baaing after their mothers, the young doves that were learning to coo in the quiet wood. He was listening to the tender sounds, when the shrubbery-gate scrooped, swung, and some one came along the footpath.

It was a man-servant in Mr. Norman's livery, who stopped short, hesitating and looking uncomfortable as he saw Edward lying on the grass, and who then, as Wrighton rose, went toward him and, awkwardly touching his hat and reddening (he was a young fellow with a soft heart, who was 'keeping company' with a pretty housemaid), handed him a card and briskly walked off.

'Mr. Norman demands Mr. Wrighton's immediate attendance at Plas Norman.'

Edward pocketed the card with a sad smile, and strode back to meet his fate. Of course Mr. Norman's anger would fall upon him. It was right. He deserved it—for having dared to give Amy that fated kiss!

He settled his hat, and went as coolly to the great house as he would have gone

to the hospital-theatre to assist his chief at an operation. But this time he was the 'subject,' and Mr. Norman was the operator.

Davies met him at the door, solemn and impenetrable.

'I will tell Mr. Norman you are here, sir,' he said, and walked off, his footsteps echoing as he went along the flag-paved corridor leading past the offices to his master's sanctum.

Edward waited. The round hall was still as a mausoleum. The statues seemed to gaze sternly at him with their blank marble eyes. The plants looked stately and graceful on their stands. The great black marble clock above the wide hearth chimed the half-hour; then the silence seemed deeper, as if these household gods of Mr. Norman's were shocked that the clock had dared

to chime in the presence of such a presumptuous intruder.

Presently Davies came back, and looking over the culprit's head, said, with icy but studied respect, 'Will you step this way, sir?'—then ushered him into the big dining-room, and drawing up two of the spring blinds, left him.

He stood glancing miserably about him. Those smooth lawns, seen through the tall plate-glass windows, where the busy gardeners were at work trimming the gay flower-beds and the peacocks were strutting, meant wealth. Any one of those heavily framed oil-paintings—sea-fights, Dutch still-life, some Canalettis, a few Van Ostades, would have realized more at a sale than he possessed in the world. His being here, thus, struck him as an absurdity. But a

couple of family portraits, hanging above the carved sideboard, seemed to gaze severely at him, as if they thought it far worse even than that.

Then the door opened, and Mr. Norman entered—stiff, severe. Barely acknowledging the young man's presence with a slight nod, he walked to the hearthrug, and, adjusting his eyeglasses, stared at him with an effort to repress his overflowing wrath.

‘If it were not for the respect I have for your celebrated uncle,’ he began, ‘I should have taken other steps. You, sir, would not be here now, nor should I be speaking to you.’

As he spoke, he was struck with the young man's demeanour. He stood there, pale, with bent head, evidently deeply moved. But his attitude was that of one

who had accidentally injured another and was in despair thereat. There was no trace of triumph or of hopefulness in the drooping figure. Edward's face was sad, but composed and dignified.

‘I was not the one to seek this interview, sir.’

Mr. Norman, mollified in spite of himself by the aspect and tone of the offender, felt confused.

‘First of all,’ he began undecidedly, ‘I must beg that Miss Norman’s name be kept out of the matter. I am bound to protect my daughter’s honour, and you will understand that Miss Norman’s name cannot under any circumstance be mentioned again by me to you, or by you to me.’

Here both men started. The door was flung open ; there was a laugh, and some-

thing like a big butterfly entered and flew across, and seemed to alight by Wrighton. It confused these two men, already dazed with emotion, like an unexpected flash of lightning. For a moment they hardly knew what had happened. Then Mr. Norman saw his Amy standing by that man, her fair hand laid protectingly on the shoulder of his rough tweed coat; saw this, and sickened with horror, and mingled fear and anger. And Wrighton, as the warm clinging touch came to him, and Amy's right hand was on his shoulder, and her left was lightly laid in his, felt first weakened, then suddenly strong. He raised that little hand, respectfully touched it with his lips, and said :

‘ Miss Norman, may I ask you to leave me with your father ? This is no place for you.’

‘No ; most certainly it is no place for you,’ repeated Mr. Norman, feeling his first jealous pang at his darling’s affectionate manner to another man. ‘Go, Amy ; cease to disgrace yourself and me.’

‘Disgrace ? Oh, if there is a question of disgrace, then certainly I am right to have come in,’ said Amy, with a glance at her father which meant quiet defiance.

‘Do go !’ pleaded Wrighton.

‘If you do not go, I shall request Mr. Wrighton to accompany me to my office,’ said her father stiffly.

‘If you wished me to go you should not have mentioned the word “disgrace,” papa. There can be no question of disgrace in this. I must marry some day, I suppose, and I wish to marry Mr. Wrighton. That is all. If you choose to oppose me, and leave your

money to some one else, do so. Mr. Wrighton is quite willing to take me without a shilling. Are you not?' she added, moving away and flashing her great eyes upon Edward. 'Did you not tell me so in the shrubbery this morning? Did you not say that you would much rather marry me without money than with it?'

Her words seemed to batter upon father and lover as a hailstorm. This was innocent audacity with a vengeance.

'I *did* say I would wish for you for my wife, if you were not as you are, 'Miss Norman,' said Edward, with tender respect in voice and manner. 'But I did not mean that I should wish to drag you down into a struggling life such as mine is. I would rather die here, now, at once, on the spot, than do that.'

‘This is awful,’ said Mr. Norman. ‘This is too much. I must refuse to discuss this —this sudden affliction with you, sir. I am overcome. To-morrow Dr. Andreos will be here. Then I will request the honour of a further interview.’

Edward bowed, his eyes upon the ground. In love as he was, Amy’s unparalleled behaviour had almost shocked him. He pardoned her taking the initiative with him because of that kiss. But to-day’s interference he felt to be unprecedented.

‘Of course, sir, when you send for me, I am at your disposal,’ he said ; then, with a sudden low bow to father and daughter, he went quickly out, in a mental turmoil of mingled love, shame, and confusion.

Mr. Norman looked after him vaguely, then sank into a chair, his head in his hands.

‘Papa,’ said Amy, advancing towards him.

‘Listen——’

‘Leave me,’ said her father, looking up with such tear-laden eyes that she was dismayed. ‘Leave me—to pray God that you may not break my heart.’

She looked at him for a moment, scared, then rushed off. Harman was sitting quietly at work in Amy’s sitting-room, little dreaming of what was going forward, when her charge came tearing into the room, and flung herself upon her in a storm of tears and sobs.

‘Everyone hates me,’ was her cry. ‘No one will do anything I like.’

Harman did not reply, except by soothing caresses and fond talk, till she ‘brought the child to reason,’ as she called it.

‘It’s a lot of trouble about one stickle-back,’ she reflected, after all was calm. ‘But it won’t last long, that’s one comfort. The doctor’ll be back to-morrow.’





CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR'S RETURN.

WHILE Edward Wrighton, as Dr. Andreos' *locum tenens*, had had more disturbing experiences during his few days of office than the doctor had endured in as many years, Dr. Andreos was passing through somewhat of an ordeal in London.

It was evident from the first that he took a vivid interest in the suffering young nobleman, to help whom he had been summoned from his seclusion at Artro. Arrived in London, he drove straight to Doume House,

where he was expected. He was ushered into the library, where Sir George Wrighton was closeted with the Marchioness of Doume and her second son, Lord Arthur Beville.

The hunchbacked doctor saw a tall, graceful young man, who towered above him as he advanced to meet him, saying, 'Anything we can say, Dr. Andreos, would be poor thanks for this.' The sad smile on Lord Arthur's fair face, and his troubled, anxious expression, prepossessed the doctor in his favour, although he had started on this journey of discovery sternly determined not to be influenced. Then Lady Doume rose, and saying a few broken words of welcome in acknowledgment of the little man's shambling bow, left the library, her handkerchief to her eyes.

‘You are like your mother,’ said Andreos abruptly, to Lord Arthur.

It was a curious remark, under the circumstances. but people expected eccentricities from a man who was as extraordinarily developed mentally as he was curiously developed physically.

‘I am,’ said Lord Arthur.

Then Dr. Andreos shook hands with Sir George Wrighton, whom he remembered as a strong-looking, brown-haired man, but who, in these few years, had grown bent and grey.

‘Does *he* know?’ was Andreos’ question to Sir George in an undertone, with a significant glance of his bright eyes towards Lord Arthur.

‘Most certainly,’ warmly replied Sir George, with a kind look at his young host.

‘I know that the conclusion of my poor brother’s physicians is, that he has been subjected to slow poisoning,’ said Lord Arthur wearily. ‘And I need scarcely tell you, Dr. Andreos, that I am even more anxious than they to sift matters and to protect his most valuable life—even, if needs be, by the sacrifice of my own worthless existence.

His death would mean my mother’s.’

Here his voice faltered.

‘Lord Doume is an invalid, paralysed—all falls upon Lord Arthur,’ commented Sir George, in a sympathetic undertone. (He was so completely won by Lord Arthur that in secret moments he had thought it *would* be a good thing if the sickly, pedantic Lord Helfont did die, leaving his younger brother heir to the marquise.)

‘I know,’ said Andreos shortly.

Then he asked to see the patient. He declined Lord Arthur's offers of refreshment.

'The first step is for me to see your brother,' he said peremptorily.

'May I accompany you?' asked Lord Arthur.

'No.'

The 'no' was so sharply, almost rudely given, as Dr. Andreos turned to Sir George with a gesture meaning that he must lead the way to the sick-chamber — that Sir George felt bound to pause on the threshold and to glance mute apology towards the young man.

'Another man would not have come,' murmured Lord Arthur in his ear.

Then Sir George, reassured, conducted Dr. Andreos to Lord Helfont's room.

A large chamber, dimly lighted. A figure

with a white face tossing and tumbling, with short, miserable moans, in the shadows of the great four-post bedstead.

A neatly-capped nurse came forward from behind the curtain at the foot of the bed, and with a reverential courtesy to the hunch-backed chemist, whose great name was a word of awe in the medical world, whispered, 'Much worse, Sir George. Restless, delirious.'

Andreos shambled to the bed and looked closely at the invalid. Then he turned and loudly asked for 'More light.'

The nurse quickly lighted wax candles in a silver branch and stood by the doctor. The yellow flames flickered on the wasted form that ceaselessly wriggled, on the skeleton hands that alternately clutched the bed-clothes and tossed into the air.

‘Lord Helfont! Look at me!’

The loud call—the sudden light—roused the sufferer. First he lay motionless, then he abruptly turned his face upon the pillow, full into the light. What a face! The skin drawn tight upon the starting bones, the great dark eyes searching into space from out their frames of circled black—the lips blue and shrivelled asunder, painfully showing the white teeth, the black hair falling wildly about.

‘Who are you?’ came from those poor cracked lips in a strange hoarse whisper, as Lord Helfont’s strained eyes were fixed on Dr. Andreos. ‘Oh!’ (then there was a gleam of recognition)—‘you are my father. You have got young again. Are you Lord Helfont, or the Marquis of Doume?’ Then, attacked with a sudden spasm, he gave a low

cry, and threw himself to the other corner of the bed, writhing and biting the pillow.

‘How is this? He is much worse,’ said Sir George to the nurse. ‘There was nothing of all this at three o’clock.’

‘No, Sir George——’

The nurse was interrupted by Dr. Andreos demanding all bottles, glasses, and cups obtainable that had been used by the invalid. They were brought out and ranged upon a distant table. Dr. Andreos sat down, and spent half an hour tasting and testing, as calmly as if he were alone, far away, in what his housekeeper, Mrs. Allen, called his ‘labetary.’

Sir George, who, with the aid of the nurse whose turn it was to take her rest, and a newly arrived nurse whose turn it was to watch, was vainly endeavouring

to relieve the growing restlessness of the patient—glanced occasionally at the curious squat figure busy in the corner, and seemingly unconscious of their presence, with wonder.

‘An extraordinary power of concentration,’ he reflected. ‘But that is of course necessary for chemical discoveries.’

Dr. Andreos’ face had shown marks of more than interest—of deep feeling—while examining the patient. Yet now he behaved as if Lord Helfont did not exist. Presently he rose, demanded that all these things should be placed under lock and key, saw them locked away in a wardrobe in the adjacent dressing-room, pocketed the key, and returning to Lord Helfont’s bedside, resumed his diagnosis of the patient’s condition.

Then he withdrew to the library with Sir George.

‘Vegetable poison,’ was his decree. ‘Not one only. And so carefully and minutely administered, that if the young man dies the post-mortem appearances can scarcely be conclusive.’

Sir George was aghast. It is one thing to have vague suspicions, but quite another thing altogether to have those suspicions suddenly and completely realized.

‘Good God, you don’t say so!’ broke from him almost involuntarily. ‘But who could it be? How could it be?’

His mind was in a turmoil. Dr. Andreos’ sudden *fiat* was to it as a heavy missile thrown into a pond. Acknowledged great man as he was, even his mind could be thrown into confusion by a shock.

‘That is not my business to find out,’ said the doctor. ‘You wanted my opinion and my advice. I am not a detective. You have my opinion. I will either supplement that with my advice, or take the whole responsibility of the—I won’t say cure, but prevention of further mischief.’

Sir George, who, to tell the truth, was getting somewhat weary of his perplexing case, accepted Andreos’ suggestion almost with eagerness.

‘Of course,’ he explained, ‘I feel that you can deal with it as I never could—as no man could, except yourself.’ Then he enlarged upon the peculiarity of the case. ‘You might never have another such. It will be of use to you.’

Meanwhile Dr. Andreos, deep in meditation, hardly heard.

‘I suppose I can have two students?’ he asked suddenly.

‘Students?’ Sir George smiled a vague interrogation.

‘Yes—male nurses. Money is no object here, I suppose?’

Sir George felt obliged to defend his nurses from an implied impeachment. They were beyond reproach, above suspicion.

‘They are women,’ said Andreos shortly.
‘I want men.’

Then he shortly told Sir George his intentions. The young viscount was to be isolated with two male nurses, who would be ready and willing to be imprisoned in a suite of apartments, with himself as gaoler. Thus, and thus only, would he undertake the case.

The matter was suggested to the sorrowing mother and brother, who acquiesced not only readily, but with grateful eagerness.

Dr. Andreos went over Doume House, selected his apartments, had them arranged according to his liking, and established himself there with the invalid and the two students, who were somewhat uncouth and bearish, but whom he believed he could trust.

In two days Lord Helfont was free from pain. In five days he began to eat and sleep. At the end of the week, Dr. Andreos (who was treated in the house, especially by Lady Doume, as a sort of deity) ordered an invalid carriage and took the patient away. Not even the attending students knew where they were going. After

establishing Lord Helfont under reliable medical attendance, he sent the telegram to Artro.

Next day he started for Artro himself. He had his own plans. He wished to look through that pocket-book in which he had minutely recorded the events of these last days. He ordered a compartment in advance. While journeying, he read and re-read this medical diary, adding notes and remarks. Then he put away the book in his breast-pocket, and took up the *Times*.

Almost the first paragraph he saw was :
'Fatal Landslip at Gwyllwch Quarry, near Artro, Abermaw.'

There was an account of the horrors—evidently a garbled account. Wrighton was mentioned as a 'Dr. Wrotton, from London.'

Only the concluding sentence, alluding to Amy as having organised the ambulance 'with a skill and fortitude beyond her years' was simple and true.

As Dr. Andreos read, his eyes glistened. Poor creatures! He knew them all; quarrymen, wives, even some of the sweethearts from the neighbouring towns and villages. He imagined the scene. Then he thought very tenderly of Amy.

So fragile, so delicate. Yet, on occasion, so strong! What a will she had! He thought over the various circumstances when she had shown that will. He laughed at some of his recollections—laughed, with his eyes wet. Amy! The name seemed to him at that moment dearer, almost holier, than ever. Leaning up in his corner, he dreamily watched the beautiful landscape

with a feeling of content that he was being carried to Artro as swiftly as human locomotion could carry anyone.

‘How strange!’ he thought. ‘While I was working—loaded with terrible responsibility—so was she!’

Then the train slackened and went jerkily. Hills rose on either side, and, letting down the window, he heard the murmur of the estuary.

It was high tide. The wide river flooded the base of its green banks. Here were those familiar hills. There was the patch of woodland which hid Plas Norman. Now the train steamed slowly round the corner. He could see the white-fringed waves running rapidly in upon the seashore; and in the foreground the pretty little panorama of Artro village, with its cottages perched

among the rising lanes and the green fields, and with its shed-like station.

As they went nearer, he saw two or three men on the platform. Then the train stopped; Mr. Norman came to the carriage-door.

‘Thank God you are come!’ he said huskily, lending his arm to Dr. Andreos, who at once saw that his friend was aged—blanched, shrivelled.

‘This has knocked you over, Norman,’ he said kindly, as they went along the platform. ‘How has *she* stood it?’

Mr. Norman abruptly turned away, giving orders to the attentive station-master about the carriage of Dr. Andreos’ portmanteau.

‘Will you walk up with me?’ he asked, turning his wan face towards the doctor.

‘Yes.’

Then the two men set off.

‘There is something wrong with Amy. Out with it!’ said the doctor peremptorily, as they went along the path across the fields.

‘That young man you left here has been making love to her, and she actually wants to marry him!’ said Mr. Norman.

Then he told his story.

The doctor stopped short—gave a curious laugh—then walked on again.

‘Just what I expected,’ he said somewhat gruffly.

‘Yet you left him here in a responsible position——’

‘My good friend, do let us talk common-sense. I knew that something of this sort must come to the child, sooner or later, just as I knew she must have her childish dis-

tempers. We must treat it in the same way.'

'What do you mean?'

Mr. Norman spoke irritably. He thought the doctor absurd.

'We must protect her——'

'Well, I know that—but how?'

'Leave that to me.'

'You little know how obstinate she is.'

'It does not matter how obstinate she is ;
I do not intend to oppose her.'

'Well, then, how on earth are you going to put an end to the foolery?'

Mr. Norman stopped short, and looked almost angrily at the little doctor.

'Will you leave it to me—or will you manage it yourself?'

Mr. Norman sulkily strutted on ; then muttered that perhaps it would be better

if the doctor experimentalised, then, after his experiments failed, he himself would take the affair in hand.

‘My good sir, I shall *not* fail,’ said Dr. Andreos, as Mr. Norman held the gate of the grounds open for him to pass through.

‘We shall see.’

‘I won’t ask you particulars, for I mean her to tell me all about it in her own words.’

‘If she will.’

The doctor sharply glanced up, and saw Amy watching for them at the window. As they approached, she disappeared.

‘She is anxious,’ he thought.

While he and Mr. Norman had been walking and talking, he had been meditating, rapidly, determinedly.

‘I will go to her room,’ he said to Mr.

Norman, after nodding to Davies, who met the pair at the hall-door with bows and smiles of relieved welcome. 'When you are to come, I shall ring.'

He found Amy dressed in her prettiest blue, lace-trimmed morning-gown. In the circular bower of lace, white sheen, blue draperies—she, on her shell-shaped sofa, looked like some ethereal nineteenth-century goddess.

As she rose and stretched out her hands towards her old friend, there was the appealing gesture of Amy—the child in the picture—grown into this queenly, supple creature who looked down upon him now from her superior height.

He gave a curious, short laugh, peculiar to himself, and took her hands.

'You are looking well, in spite of all this

fuss,' he said, thinking—'her hands are warm ; she is not beyond a cure.'

(Dr. Andreos had a theory that deep emotional disturbance and ordinary circulation could not co-exist.)

Then he showed her the paragraph in the newspaper, and elicited her account of the facts of the Gwyllwch accident. As she talked, he watched the varying colour rising and fading on her soft cheek, the glistening and sparkling of her eloquent eyes. While she was speaking, he hardly heard ; he was looking for signs of the sudden frenzy her father was so disturbed about. He found but one. She did not mention Wrighton.

He interrupted her with a little grunt.

'You don't say how my *locum tenens*

acquitted himself,' he said, taking out his pet snuff-box, and enjoying a pinch.

(Although Dr. Andreos was still young, his nose, doubtless cruelly tried by the pungency of his various chemicals, craved snuff, and had it.)

'Oh—he was all right,' said Amy, with a searching look, which meant—'Have you heard anything?'

'Did he do any heroic acts that would justify a claim to a Humane Society's medal? Or am I right, that he thinks himself entitled to even a greater reward than that?'

He lifted one of Amy's hands, and looked at it as he would have looked at some curious specimen. The action was significant.

Amy blushed.

‘Papa has been speaking to you?’ she asked, snatching away her hand.

‘It would be a hard day for me, my child, if your father had to tell me your confidences, second-hand.’

The doctor suddenly looked his ‘child’ full in the face, with those strange eyes, at once so daring, keen, and melancholy. He had never met Amy’s eyes with his own but she had felt an influence—a sensation, she knew not what—the presence of some subduing power.

‘Oh, if you want me to tell you, I will tell you everything!’ she said, capitulating.

And she turned away her head, leant her forehead against the arm of the sofa, and holding the doctor’s hand between hers, made a somewhat apologetic confession, confused and stammering. She had had

no idea what her proceedings had really been till she had to put them into words. Then they sounded very ugly indeed. Her ears burned, her whole being glowed with shame, although Dr. Andreos fortified her by occasional 'wells,' and 'yes-es,' in an encouraging voice.

'That's all,' she said, somewhat defiantly, as she ended with an account of her share in Wrighton's interview with her father. And as she stretched her neck and poised her pretty head on the sofa-arm, she almost hated Edward and the engagement, and the situation altogether, and fancied that the Lady Jane Grey she had been but lately reading about was by no means so much to be pitied as people thought. One sharp snap, and the poor thing had gone out of her difficulties for ever.

‘Hah!’ said the doctor thoughtfully.

Then he gave those fair hands a kindly pat, put them back on their owner’s lap, and again refreshed himself with snuff.

‘Your account of this complication of affairs is hardly lucid,’ he began. ‘Let me see. Firstly, you took an interest in this young man because he was doing his duty decently. Secondly, you pitied him because two of his patients died. Thirdly, you admired his bravery, I think you called it, at the quarry landslip. Fourthly, you quarrelled with him as he was taking you home; and then, fifthly, you grew emotional because when he thought you were dead he was mad enough to dare to kiss you. Sixthly, this first masculine kiss planted upon the fallow soil of your lips blossomed out as irrepressibly as Jack’s beanstalk, and

led to your not only thinking that the first man who dared to kiss you must naturally become your husband, but that it was your place to ask him to marry you.'

'Stop !' said Amy, in a choked voice. To hear bare, cruel truth uttered in this cold-blooded manner was almost unbearable.

'My child ! I am only repeating what you have said.'

'But in such a dreadful way !' said Amy piteously. 'Not the right way, at all ; anyone hearing you talk would think me—I don't know what.'

Tears sprang to her eyes. The doctor saw the convulsive attempt to control them.

'My dearest child, if you can tell me, honestly, that you love this young man as a young woman should love the man who is to be her husband, young and inexperi-

enced though you are, I will not say nay.
A hard life hurts no one.'

'I shall like it,' said Amy. 'It is you who have taught me to wish to work.'

'But how about the love?' asked Dr. Andreos innocently.

'It is not difficult to love anyone; and there is so much in Mr. Wrighton to admire.'

'Hah!' said the doctor again.

He was growing more reassured that his plan was a right one—the only one. He gathered that the child was no more in love with Edward Wrighton than *he* was. This was a whim, the outcome of solitude and boredom, and must be treated as such. Cross one of Amy's whims, and you bred difficulties wholesale. He saw his way clearly.

'Well, since you will begin mature re-

sponsibilities before you are ripe for them, I suppose I must help to load your poor little shoulders,' he said good-naturedly, rising from the sofa. 'Ah, here's Harman' (as Harman, who had been discreetly waiting in the adjoining bedroom until she heard the doctor move to depart, came in briskly, happy in the confidence that now the doctor resumed the reins everything would be all right). 'Well, Harman, all these births and engagements to marry, and deaths, and horrors, don't seem to have disagreed with you.'

'No, sir.'

Harman saw by the twinkle of the doctor's eyes that the story of the strawberry jam might perhaps be repeated in a more serious manner, and she felt joyous accordingly.

‘We must talk over everything quietly by-and-by.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Harman respectfully opening the door for the doctor, who, if it were possible, was still greater in her estimation for his cool disposal of the ‘dear child’s nonsense.’ ‘Well, dear,’ she began cheerily, ‘and what does the doctor say?’

‘I wish you would not say “Well, dear;” it is so irritating,’ said Amy, with a new pettishness.

‘Has the doctor annoyed you, darling?’ Harman’s good temper was unassailable.

‘No one has any sympathy for anyone,’ said Amy vaguely. She felt disgusted with Wrighton, her father, Dr. Andreos, Harman, but chiefly with herself. She thought she did not know why. But the fact was that she felt she had made a great

mistake, and could not see how it was to be rectified.

Meanwhile, the rectifying of the mistake, if it were really such, was going forward. Dr. Andreos sent for Wrighton, and while he and Mr. Norman were awaiting the culprit, he spoke seriously, but to the point. He disclosed his plans; and before Wrighton was announced, Mr. Norman looked vastly relieved, although still somewhat doubtful.

The interview took place in the dining-room. Mr. Norman was standing on the hearthrug, the doctor was in a low armchair close by. Both looked up as Edward came in, hat in hand. Dr. Andreos gave him a keen searching glance, then turned away and took snuff.

‘Hah!’ he sighed, as he tapped the box

and looked thoughtfully into the brown dust.
'The old story.'

Amy, the woman, unruffled, bent on getting her own way at any price. Wrighton, pale, worn ('Hard hit, poor devil!' as the doctor commented), ready to sacrifice himself anyhow, whenever and how-ever Amy demanded.

Even Mr. Norman, who detested Edward, was mollified as the young man gravely saluted both his judges, saying:

'I meet you again, Dr. Andreos, in a painful position. I have been rash, for the first and for the last time in my life. Mr. Norman is justly angry with me. All I can say is, that you and Mr. Norman must dictate to me, and that I am prepared to obey.'

'But all this does not undo the harm

that has been done. Your presumption, sir——'

Dr. Andreos stayed Mr. Norman's outburst with a peremptory gesture.

'Let us hear what you may have to propose,' he drily said, turning to Edward.

Edward hesitated. After hours of wretched self-accusation, loving Amy, hating himself for that fatal kiss which had brought about all this, and arriving at *that* depth of low-spiritedness when a man feels as if he could go the round of his fellow-creatures begging to be shot, or put out of his misery anyhow, he had not a suggestion in his mind to make.

'I will go—leave here at once, if you wish it.'

'Certainly,' said the doctor briskly. 'But the question is how. Mr. Norman

feels bound to consider Miss Norman's wishes. Miss Norman has consented to be engaged to you, and desires to maintain that consent.'

Edward looked up. But he was scarcely hopeful. Depression had gone too far. Still, as Dr. Andreos began to explain on what terms his conduct would not only be pardoned, but justified, his drooping spirits gradually re-animated.

These terms were—that he should accept the position of medical attendant to the invalid Lord Helfont, who was about to travel for two or three years, this appointment being kept secret until he should have left Artro ; that he should leave Artro within three days, and that during those three days, although no restriction would appear to be placed upon his interviews with Amy,

he must consent not to be with her more than one hour of the twenty-four, and he must give his word not to speak to her of any future.

As Wrighton listened, there seemed nothing difficult or peculiar in this arrangement. He had to experience these subtle bonds to learn how they hemmed him round and bound him down.

If he chose to reject these terms, he was offered to write to Amy, confessing that he had been mistaken in his feelings towards her, and that he thought better to withdraw his pretensions to her hand.

‘But that would be a lie, sir,’ said Edward warmly, spurred into indignation. ‘I have not hitherto told voluntary lies, and I never intend to.’

The little outburst did not harm him

with either of the men. Still, Dr. Andreos coldly remarked that this was scarcely the occasion for emotional display.

‘I will leave without one word, or look, or sign,’ said Edward; ‘but not with a lie. I *do* love your daughter, Mr. Norman, although I know I am no fitting husband for her now. Still, I have the future before me in which to make a name, a position. It would be *my* wish to leave matters as they are, and to go away, and take my chance of coming back again, a suitable suitor——’

‘You have your alternative,’ said Dr. Andreos drily. ‘You accept the engagement at our terms, or you decline it, also at our terms. Take your choice.’

There was a minute’s pause in the great, solemn room. Mr. Norman gave a deep

sigh, as an inheritor, certain of his inheritance, might give on the occasion of the reading of the will. Dr. Andreos stared straight through the window, a curious half-smile, half-sneer upon his lips.

Edward looked round. He was puzzled. One way led back to peace, freedom, brave struggle. The other led on to wonderful possibilities. To do him justice, he thought more of Amy than of himself at this juncture. To leave her heartlessly, almost brutally, would bruise, retard her sweet young life. (He put aside the sharp anguish he knew *he* should feel if he did this.) No; it would be better to accept Mr. Norman's terms. If Amy really loved him, some day she would be his. And if she did not, it would be better to accept these barriers, which would speedily cancel the communi-

cations between any but the truest, most trusting lovers.

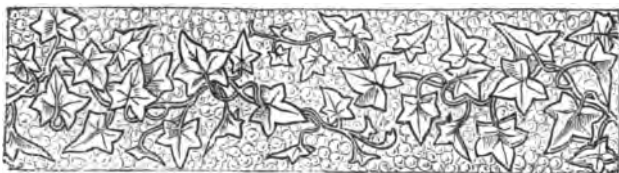
Turning to Mr. Norman, he respectfully declared in favour of the limited engagement. Then there was a discussion anent minor matters. Dr. Andreos evidently intended to settle the boundaries Edward must not pass. The railway time-table was sent for, and the very minute fixed for his departure. After that he asked when he might see Miss Norman. According to present arrangements, he could only see Amy twice, one hour each time, before he left Artro.

‘To-night, at six, you will find her in the garden,’ said the doctor sharply. ‘And when you hear the dressing-gong, you leave. It rings at seven.’

Then, after a cold leave-taking, Edward

went away, with a heavy heart. He vaguely felt that he was hardly dealt with ; but how, or what would come of all this, only time would or could show.





CHAPTER III.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

AMY was sitting at her window, pretending to work at a baby's frock for her godchild, poor dead Mary's infant. Harman, who read aloud very nicely, was reading some dull but proper tale, when she was sent for by Dr. Andreos.

She was absent about ten minutes. No work for Amy then! She gazed out of window, watching, and saw Edward go slowly down the steps, along the carriage drive, and out of the gate. Her heart beat.

She dared not call out. She coughed. He did not look up. He walked on, slowly and disconsolately.

‘A man who loved a girl would have turned round and looked up at her window,’ she thought, with a certain amount of truth. ‘He knows my window well enough. What an ungainly walk he has! What high shoulders!’

Amy gazed after her first conquest almost disgustedly. It was her first experience of ‘*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*’ Then she rapidly withdrew her head. Harman came back, with a little twisted note from Dr. Andreos.

‘MY DEAR CHILD,

‘Your father has consented to your engagement. I need scarcely add my con-

gratulations. Mr. Wrighton will call to see you at six o'clock. I told him he would find you near the waterfall in the grounds; then you can have a quiet talk. God bless you!

‘Your old friend,

‘ANDREOS.’

Amy read the note with no elation, with little satisfaction. She twisted it about, then it dropped upon the floor. Harman picked it up, and laid it on a side-table.

‘You don’t seem pleased, dear, although the doctor has arranged everything so nicely for you,’ said Harman.

‘They are all so fussy and absurd,’ said Amy, with a flash of her great eyes.

Then she looked out of window again. If matters had only been managed in her

way, there would have been some passion and grandeur about this generous bestowal of herself. There might have been some altercation, but the altercation would have been intense and dignified. Her father would have raged more; the doctor would have been in consternation. There might have been scenes, rages, wild anger; but then there would have been a general yielding all round.

At that moment Edward, instead of sneaking drearily out of the grounds like a whipped hound, might have been at her feet, kissing her hands, adoring her with overwhelming love, like the lovers in poems and novels.

‘The idea of waiting till six o’clock,’ she thought.

It was a bright spring day. Outside the

scene was gay; the flowers basked in the sunshine. The young trees trembled in the breeze. Beyond, tiny wavelets in the distance sparkled like diamonds. Two white butterflies went chasing each other across the lawn, in and out, up and down, as if they were dancing a quadrille in the air. A stable cat had brought two fat kittens into a warm nook, and was playing with them. It was all youth, playful freedom. Only *she* was not to be young and to have her play. It all came of her father and Dr. Andreos being old. They could not sympathise with the young.

‘Harman, I wish there were no old people!’ she said disgustedly. ‘Old people are a mistake.’

Harman smiled.

‘I am afraid, dear, that the world with-

out old people—as you call them—would be something like a nursery-full of children without a nurse,’ she said, going on with her task of dusting Amy’s multitudinous belongings—bric-à-brac, half-finished bits of fancy-work, half-read or uncut new books, piles of unused stationery.

Amy mentally disagreed with this. She wanted *her day*. The sunshine of her life seemed so gorgeous, that she could not believe that clouds would gather, that noontide might bring the storm to beat upon her little head till she would be thankful to shelter it anywhere—even in the dust!

To her idea, the old progressed Sisyphus-like. One step forward, two backward.

‘They have taken all the spirit out of that poor fellow with some nonsense or

other,' she thought, almost hating her father and Andreos. 'Let them! We will see if I won't put new life and hope into him! Harman!' she cried impetuously, 'I shall lunch here. I am going to ride. Please ring and order Butterfly for three o'clock. I will wear my grey habit. And young Simmonds had better go with me, on Jerry.'

'She is going to have one of those old devil's rides,' thought Harman, as she meekly obeyed her imperious young mistress.

Butterfly was Amy's thoroughbred young mare, as yet scarcely broken in. Simmonds was a daring young groom, with bold black eyes, who had ridden buck-jumpers in South America, and, boasting that nothing in horseflesh could throw him, could ride the

irritable Jerry. The grey habit Amy only wore when she meant what the old coachman called 'riding to the devil.' So Harman understood.

'Well, they say as there's a cherub that sits up aloft and takes care of the life of poor Jack,' she said, as she stood and watched Amy—a grey figure on the pirouetting Butterfly—amble jerkily out of sight. 'And if able seamen are that looked after, one oughtn't so to say feel timid about a young lady as is all in all to her father, and that good doctor with his affliction, let alone me.'

And Harman's eyes were moist. Still, she turned sharply and scolded Davies, who came simpering up when he saw his admired one shading her eyes and looking after her young lady; and she flounced off and

back to her rooms, as if she were in the highest spirits.

No sooner out of the grounds, out of sight, than Amy gathered up her reins, steadied herself in her saddle, settled her habit, gripped her stirrup with her pliant foot, and smartly touched Butterfly's flanks with her whip.

Simmonds, following, saw Butterfly start, rear, and tear off at racing speed. He followed. The air whizzed in his ears. He had to hold his breath as Jerry galloped after the flying figure that seemed to skim the ground, swallow-like, as it darted along the road. Still he thought admiringly how fitting a match would be between so daring a rider as his young mistress and the well-known turfite, Lord Dooley. It would be all horses, and

nothing else ; and he, as my lady's groom, would naturally have a prominent position in that palatial stable.

'Meanwhile, she goes a-wasting of her favours upon that chap, who don't look as ever he'd clapped eyes on a 'orse before he came 'ere,' thought Simmonds with disgust.

Amy had none about her sympathizing with her tastes in mankind. Not even this young groom who smartly sprang down and reverentially assisted her to alight when she drew rein at Gwyllwch Quarry.

It was a curious feeling that brought her here, but not an unmixed feeling. Her disappointed annoyance had roused her. She was 'all on wires.' She felt it would steady her to see Gwyllwch Quarry again—that stage on which a tragedy had been so lately enacted. It would strengthen her faith in

Wrighton to recollect the incidents of that day of which she chose to consider him the hero.

She sprang down, told Simmonds to walk the reeking horses about while she went into the quarry ; then she gathered up her long skirt and went through the gate.

All was much the same as it had been before the accident. The great rocky heights were grey against the blue sky. The heaps of powdered slate lying about glistened in the sunshine. Puffs of smoke—short explosions—told of blasting, yonder, where the moving specks meant busy workmen. A steady grating sound meant the creeping trucks that were slowly moving on the lines towards the spot where the labourers were excavating. No one would have guessed, looking at the quiet scene where calm work

was steadily proceeding, that the other day this had been the death-bed of a score or more of human beings.

As Amy stood there and looked around, she realized what seemed to her a horrible truth.

‘No one cares,’ she said aloud, to herself.
‘Torture, death—and no one cares.’

She had rushed hither for a sedative to her nervous passion, and she had found it. The idea of all the terror, the anxiety, the disaster of the other day being so speedily forgotten, was like ice suddenly applied to her young emotion.

So many human beings smothered—and no one cared. Her father had eaten and drunk as usual. Dr. Andreos was not concerned. ‘And I?’ she asked. Then came a frightful humiliation. She? Had she

not thought of 'marriage, and giving in marriage?' She drooped her head, blaming herself for having blamed others where she herself was more culpable, if culpable it were.

She turned, and went into the stable to find comfort in the remembrance that here she and Harman and other women had done what they could to mitigate suffering.

All was different. A few big cart-horses were in the stalls. There was a sound of munching and of rattling, as they tossed their heads and looked round at the intruder. There was the pungent stable smell. Amy went out, up to that one cottage which was left. She knocked at the door. A little girl answered it. She looked rosy, contented, trim. 'Grandfather was all right,' she said in Welsh. 'Those that

didn't get much hurt were going on all right. And didn't those that got killed have a fine funeral !'

The little girl with her round eyes and rosy face spoke almost with envy of this great termination to some insignificant lives.

Amy returned—shocked, perhaps—but in a more common-sense frame of mind.

As she rode home at a moderate canter, she began to wonder whether she were more, or less selfish, than other people. The train of thought was an uncomfortable one. She dismissed it with a hasty resolution to be good to everyone—grateful to her father and Dr. Andreos, thoughtful for Harman, and as humbly loving a betrothed to Wrighton as if he were the rich man raising her to a better position in life, instead of

she, the heiress, endowing him with all her worldly goods.

It was a fair exchange. He was so much cleverer, better than she was !

She returned to Harman (who was always on tenter-hooks when Amy was out riding Butterfly) quite meek and tame. Instead of grumbling about that six o'clock appointment, she sat down, cut the leaves of one of her instructive books, and read. If Prescott's eloquent descriptions of ancient Mexican cities were mingled in her mind with experiences in the quarry and in the green spring wood when she and Edward came to an understanding—and if she *did* hear each quarter chime till at last the clock struck five—she had made an effort to behave sensibly, and that in itself reassured her.

At five she sprang up and dressed for dinner. Of course, Edward was to dine with them. Perhaps they would stroll together afterwards on the terrace, and talk of their future lives under the starry night-sky. Harman had laid out a fine silk gown on the bed.

‘Oh, not that,’ she said when she saw it.

Then she went to her wardrobe, and fumbling among her dresses, pulled out one—the gown she wore when Edward dined with them the night before the quarry landslide.

‘Oh, but that is all tumbled, Miss Amy; I was going to take it to the workroom to be seen to——’

Harman was in dismay.

‘Never mind,’ said Amy determinedly, forgetting how thoughtful she had promised

to be for her good Harman. And the dress went on, tumbled as it was.

‘Of all the curious notions as ever was!’ thought poor Harman, as Amy picked up fan and gloves and handkerchief, and almost rushed away. ‘Anyone with half an eye can see that gown isn’t fit for any young lady to wear. Her par ain’t one to notice much, but when a thing like that comes right under his nose——’

Harman could have cried. She sorted the wardrobe’s contents there and then. This should not happen again.

Meanwhile, Amy strolled towards the waterfall. It was light now till after seven o’clock. Still, she wondered why the doctor or Edward had proposed ‘their seeing each other’ here, at this hour.

It had been a warm day. The sun had

glowered upon the opening buds. The ferns had opened out during the noonday heat. Amy sat down on a new rustic bench. This was close by the cascade, which leapt caressingly from mossy boulder to lichened stone, and which then foamed, gleaming pale tints under the clear evening sky, before it threw itself upon the calm bosom of the tiny lake.

She sat down and dreamt her first day-dream. This stalwart young fellow, stern and true, was her first lover. She believed him to be hard, as a rule, but to her he had been the exception. She felt proud triumph as she thought how she had found the vulnerable point in his armour of cold self-possession, how she had first made him love her, then had made him acknowledge that he loved her.

How would he be to her to-day? she speculated. She fancied he would come, hurrying, impatient, trying to conceal his intensity, perhaps trembling—chill—pale, as he had been when she forced him to speak the truth up yonder in the wood. He might be there—most probably was there now—waiting for six to strike before he dared come to the trysting-place.

‘Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong.’ Then six slow deliberate strokes.

Amy glanced round, quickly, shyly, like a startled deer. He might appear from anywhere. It was an uncomfortable sensation. She intended to be self-possessed and to appear unconscious.

Hurrying from her rooms, she had snatched a volume from a bookslide on her writing-table. She did not know what it

was. Now she opened it hap-hazard, and began reading.

“They are all predacious. I have seen one of these creatures, having caught an insect, hold it out in front of its body with its fore-feet, while making its way to some place where it could in safety suck the life-juices of its prey.” Nasty thing,’ thought Amy.

Then she glanced at the heading of the page—‘The Water-Gnats’—and at the title of the book—one on insects, lent her by the doctor.

Then she began to wonder. Six, and he did not appear! It was unpardonable, extraordinary. She went on, pretending to read, her pulses beating faster. Not a foot-step, not a rustle.

‘The doctor has kept him, out of spite,’

she angrily thought, as 'ding-dong,' sounding in her ears the first quarter, made her feel as if she hated that stable-clock for telling her that he who ought to be gratefully eager to be at her feet was unpunctual—late !

Just as the half hour chimed, he came in sight, coming across the lawn. He was smoking. He walked slowly and thoughtfully, pausing every now and then and staring vacantly at the flower-beds, just as if there was no such being as Amy Norman in the world. Then Madoc rushed out of a clump of laurels, and made for him with a short bark. Amy's greyhound had a capricious temper, but had liked Wrighton from the first. He stooped to pat the greyhound, then, looking up, saw Amy, and raised his hat. He looked grave—almost sad.

' *Well !* ' said Amy significantly to herself.

What was the matter with him? He who ought to be joyous, overwhelmed with his good fortune! She was disappointed—angry. But she was determined not to show what she felt. ‘I will leave that to him,’ she thought, almost spitefully.

So she received him with a cool little nod.

‘I wonder you did not dress before you came in. It is such a journey to go all that way back uphill.’

‘Dress?’ he looked mystified.

‘Are you going to dine in that shooting-coat?’

‘Dine?’ At first, preoccupied, he hardly understood. ‘Oh, I am—that is, I have dined, at least as much dinner as I am likely to want,’ he said.

‘But of course you are to dine with us.’

‘Of course *not*,’ he said, with a faint smile; ‘I was not asked.’

‘It is a matter of course, now that everything is settled,’ said Amy, just blushing a little when she alluded to the engagement.

‘Really, dear, it is impossible, I assure you. As it is, I must leave you when the clock strikes seven.’

What a lover! Amy gave a satirical little laugh, which seemed to awaken him to the actual facts.

‘I know you must think me strange,’ he said, sitting down by her. ‘But have patience with me! It is such a new, such a peculiar situation for me. Many men would be overjoyed to be in my position, with my chances; but, oh, Amy! I feel depressed. I cannot see things in a bright light; I feel I have done wrong.’

‘It is not too late to repair the wrong,’ interrupted Amy drily, with a warning flash from her eyes. ‘I will go to papa, now, at once, if you like; I will take all the blame upon myself. He will be only too glad.’ Then she stopped. There was a pained look on Edward’s face. ‘Forgive me,’ she said, suddenly changing.

She held out her hand. He took it: the soft white hand, with the richly jewelled rings; it seemed out of place, somehow, lying on his hard rough palm. He looked at it wistfully, then dropped it.

‘They can see us from the house,’ he explained.

He had seen some one draw down a blind behind the Tower windows.

‘That is only Harman—that is my room,’ said Amy impatiently. She began to think

her future husband small-minded. 'There!' Then she moved away to the corner of the seat. 'Now, perhaps that will satisfy you.'

In any other girl the speech might have been forward. But Amy was so free from sophisticated notions, so spontaneous and natural in her ways, that in her the gestures, the words, were pretty, amusing, like the gambols of an unruly kitten.

'Your doings are in my hands—now; I have to look after you, while I may,' said Edward, with a sad smile. 'If I had only thought of that before!' He paused.

He was thinking how much better it would have been for both had he never given Amy that madman's kiss when he thought her unconscious. She did not know that they were to part, that they

were to undergo a long probation. If she did! She, who had never been thwarted! How would she bear it? Would she continue to like him when she knew that he was one of the conspirators against the immediate execution of her whims and fancies? His whole mind said 'No.'

'Back again in a brown study,' said Amy impatiently. 'Come, let us look at the waterfall.'

She sprang up, Madoc following her with slavish attention, picking his way among the pebbles, wet with spray, and looking sagaciously round to see if Wrighton were also in attendance. There was little doubt that in Madoc's dim dog-mind Amy was the one supreme motive power to be considered and obeyed.

'This is my favourite spot,' said Amy,

leaning on the bar of the rustic fence and looking at the light cascade that foamed as it splashed from grey boulder to grey boulder. 'I have a great notion of a summer evening fête—with thousands of little lamps everywhere, that will make the place look like a forest of Christmas trees, and coloured lights turned on as they do at the theatre. Would not that be nice?'

Wrighton shook his head. Would she think it 'nice,' still, after she received a letter from himself, as the medical attendant of the Viscount Helfont, saying good-bye for months, perhaps for years?

'You like nothing,' she cried, in a rage at last. 'If you are so bored with me, why don't you leave me, and go?'

'If you tell me to go, Amy, I will obey you.'

He sighed. Perhaps it would be as well.
But the tears were in his eyes.

Again Amy changed, was remorseful.

‘Stay,’ she said. And then she did a very bold thing. Her pretty fair head perched itself against his shoulder, and her little hand slid caressingly within his arm.

It was a hard moment. Edward knew those trying moments of unexpected appeal to his deepest feelings well. At the hospital some wan, sweet baby-face suddenly lifted to his, pale with fear—a cry for help and pity—perhaps thin clinging fingers clasping his hand, as Arthur might have clasped the hand of Hubert when he knew what that hand must do ; he had had to steel himself against the demand for mercy from tender suffering creatures he was doomed to torture

in their own interest. He had borne these bad moments and had been calm, and had done his duty : had chloroformed the terrified patient, and had assisted to butcher afterwards, with the true surgeon's serenity. But when *that* little hand came stealing its way to a perch perilously near his heart, he felt unmanned ; he felt a violent impulse to do—what ? To tell her everything ! to throw up everything !—to take her away, marry her there and then—defy the world, and her father, and Andreos.

The brief madness raged, passed, and left him unharmed. 'Thank God ! I have saved my honour !' he felt. He had dropped that dear little hand that rested on his arm—without knowing it. In a few moments, temptation, struggle, and victory had each done their work.

Amy only saw her betrothed pale, 'distrained;' only knew that he did not care for her little 'advances;' only felt a prevailing sensation of doubt. For a long time they stood side by side. Then, almost hopelessly, she made one more effort in the cause of this strange wooing.

'What is wrong?' she asked meekly, in subdued and patient tones.

He turned his face, lined and drawn with emotion, towards her.

'The word "wrong" should not be mentioned where we are concerned,' he said, with a smile that was unutterably sad. Then he sighed—a great sigh of relief, fatigue, with a dash of the utter hopelessness of the overburdened. 'Come,' he said. Then he offered her his arm.

Amy accepted it in a sort of silent

wonder. He escorted her back to the house without saying one word. As they came near the entrance, the stable-clock mercilessly chimed four quarters, then seemed (to Amy) to clang out seven strokes in a noisy, triumphantly aggressive way.

‘I must leave you,’ said Wrigton, far more cheerfully than he had spoken as yet. ‘There goes seven.’

Amy sprang away, and stood looking scorn, poorly repressed anger, and unutterable impatience and inquiry, on one of the steps of the great stone flight leading to the hall-door.

‘I hope, most truly, that if your patients take up your whole day to-morrow you will not come.’

She looked such a quaint creature—half-imperial in her beauty, half-babyish in her

childishly innocent manner—that in the midst of his trouble Wrighton felt almost amused.

‘To-morrow? I would not give up to-morrow—for anything,’ he said, with something akin to spontaneity. ‘To-morrow—is ours.’

Reassured, mollified, she descended a step or two.

‘I suppose you can’t come to breakfast?’ she suggested in an undertone. ‘No, of course not! But you might manage luncheon! What! the patients? Arrange your distant ones for the afternoon. I will drive you. Tom and Jerry will scour the country in no time.’

His face fell.

‘It is impossible,’ he said, in his ordinary dry way. ‘I will be waiting for you to-

morrow as it strikes six. But I must leave you at seven.'

Amy gave him one look of indignation, passion, resentment; then she courtesied with mock reverence.

'I wish your Royal Highness a very good-evening!' she cried, and went into the house.

Wrighton stared after her vacantly, took off his hat, looked absently into the crown, then pressed it down over his eyes and stalked away.

He had kept his word. This was his only consolation; or rather, this *would* have been his only consolation, had he been in a humour amenable to consolation. But he felt savage, cruel, defiant, as he turned his back upon Mr. Norman's house and strode into the woods.

He sat down on the first bench, and, his head in his hands, tried to realize his position.

‘It is no position at all,’ he told himself; ‘none. But what can I do? I love her—I love her—with the one only love I shall ever feel for woman. If I did not, I should not scruple to act in defiance of them all. As it is, I am pulled up at each thought by the fear of injuring or grieving *her*. I could be tortured and massacred for her. If I thought it would be best for her, I would not see her again. But I do not think it would,’ he assured himself, in terror at the very thought. ‘No; the darling loves me!’

Then he rallied himself, and returned to Dr. Andreos’ cottage.

Dr. Andreos had been invited to dine

at Plas Norman. On his arrival, he found Mr. Norman alone, uneasily pacing the drawing-room.

‘Amy has a headache. I think you had better see her, please,’ was his first speech.

Dr. Andreos seemed unusually cheerful. He would see Harman first, he said. So he went off and had a short interview with Harman, who assured him that it would do ‘the dear child’ more harm than good to see him. ‘She only wants a night’s rest.’

‘Thanks,’ said Dr. Andreos, turning abruptly and leaving Amy’s maid.

As he rejoined his host, he smiled a curious smile. His plans were succeeding even better than he had dared to hope.

* * * * *

The hunchbacked doctor had seldom been

more brilliant, in a more exultant good temper. He talked, relating racy anecdotes to his preoccupied host, until the dessert was placed on the table and the solemn servitors had disappeared. Then he said :

‘Well, what’s the matter?’

‘I cannot bear to make my child unhappy, Andreos. That is what’s the matter. She is everything to me.’

‘You would rather see her miserable for life, than bear the annoyance of denying her a whim. Bah! You ought to know better. If she *will* marry, let her marry something suitable.’

‘But where is the “something suitable,” as you call it, to come from?’

‘She must go out and about, like other girls. Since this affair came on, I have thought the whole matter out.’

Then, as the doctor carefully peeled and ate an orange, he disclosed his plan.

‘All this nonsense is the natural outcome of her unnatural solitude, shut up here with Harman, and you, and me. The best of women are moths, and will flutter about the flames. We have to prevent her burning her wings. That is all we can do.’

Then he recommended that Mr. Norman should have the London house, so long closed and deserted, reopened and prepared, and should remove the establishment to town at once. Amy must be presented, go to balls, etc.

Mr. Norman was aghast. He detested London. It was associated with the great grief of his life. His wife had been ill and had died there.

‘London?’ he said bitterly. ‘Impossible!’

Years ago I vowed never, under any circumstances whatever, to stay more than twenty-four hours in that dreadful city.'

'You Normans seem to be given to the making of rash vows,' said Andreos, pushing away his dessert-plate. 'At least, those members of the family I have the honour to be acquainted with are. Your sister made a vow never to come here again, when you had a difference of opinion shortly after I came to Artro, did she not?'

Mr. Norman looked annoyed. (This only sister was an elderly maiden lady, moderately well off, who had been offended with her brother at his marriage with a poor clergyman's daughter instead of with a certain Lady Gwendolen, her greatest friend. She had not been on good terms with her brother since. Miss Norman lived in Switzerland

in the summer, and in the South of France or Italy in the winter, occasionally visiting England to pay a round of visits to the country-houses of her friends.)

‘The matter was really so extremely unimportant, that I did not take the trouble to remember,’ said Mr. Norman, in answer to the doctor’s question.

The doctor took a pinch of snuff.

‘You remembered your own vow about London, though, eh? Well, one or other of those wonderful vows must be broken. So as yours is important, and your sister’s is not, let it be hers. She will have to come here and take charge of Amy, and you must keep open house and fill the place with visitors.’

‘Come here? Prudence Norman—*here?* Impossible!’ The ‘impossible’ was still

more vehement than before. 'I would not have her, for one thing; and she would not come, for another.'

'You must give her the chance, anyhow.'

'I tell you I cannot!' Mr. Norman got up, and pacing the dining-room in perturbation, held forth against his sister. She was unfeeling, hard, a schemer. He had the greatest contempt for the whole of that worldly crew, her friends. 'Thank God, *I* am not worldly,' he added piously. 'Then, her conduct to my lost angel, Amy's mother, was simply abominable!'

'Ah, now we have it,' said the doctor. 'So you won't give Miss Prudence the chance of redeeming that conduct, which I believe you exaggerate, by acting the mother to her dead sister-in-law's child?'

You boast of being a Christian, but you protest no one must expect you to act like a Christian ! Well, you are wrong. And as I intend to be your medical adviser mentally as well as physically, I tell you you are not sufficiently sound in reason, you are too prejudiced, to judge. My prescription is that you write to Miss Norman, and give her the chance of behaving well. She is Amy's nearest female relation, and the proper person to have the care of her.'

Dr. Andreos said much more in his insistent, dogmatic way, which Mr. Norman had grown so accustomed to during their long friendship, that he did not know he was actually being commanded, or how often he gave way in obedience to those commands. To-night was to be no exception.

In less than an hour Mr. Norman was

seated at his desk in his office. A sheet of paper was before him, and he was disgustedly mending a pen. The doctor sat near, to catch the light of the shaded reading-lamp. He was reading the *Athenæum*. He had finished reading one review of a new scientific book, and before commencing another, looked up and said :

‘ Well ? ’

‘ Well, I think that will do,’ said his friend, handing him the letter he had been writing.

The doctor read :

‘ DEAR PRUDENCE,

‘ I dare say you remember our many quarrels, and how bitterly we have felt towards each other. No doubt you are as well aware as I am of the fact that we have

but little chance of ever agreeing—except to differ. But our animosity need not extend farther. I would rather that my dear child Amy should remain ignorant of our feud.'

Then followed much anent that dear child Amy, her personal qualities and her position; and the letter ended with a somewhat aggressive demand that Miss Norman should at once do her duty to her motherless niece, a duty too long neglected, etc.

The doctor handed back the letter with a recommendation that it should at once go into the waste-paper basket.

'That letter would estrange you still more. No; you must be conciliatory.'

At first Mr. Norman demurred. But the doctor left Artro that night with a letter in

his pocket which he intended to post at Llanwyth next day. A letter to Miss Norman, that began by suggesting that in family coolness bygones should be bygones, etc., and ended with a warm invitation to Plas Norman.

Meanwhile Amy kept her room, in silent wrath with herself and everyone else : and when six o'clock next day came, Harman appeared and met Edward. Amy demanded to see him in her room.

Harman was distant and severe in her manner to 'that young man.' But 'that young man' had suffered so acutely the last twenty-four hours that he did not care. He was as desperately in love as a stoical temperament, suddenly taken by storm and subdued, naturally would be. He had first indulged in a mood of silent ferocity. He

had then had to discuss his cases and their results with Dr. Andreos. At first his manner to the little hunchback had been almost rude. But the doctor ignored his ill-temper with such *bonhomie*, that as the day went on he tamed, and anger waned into a humour which was half despair, half hope. After all, he and Amy were both young. Life was before them. Perhaps those who had planned an arduous probation were in the right, after all.

And Amy?

The nervous creature, primed with the accumulated excitability of a lifetime, had been through many changes of feeling in those twenty-four hours.

Suspicion of Edward; then, as violent a confidence in his integrity. Dislike of his 'strained notions of duty;' then, as complete

an admiration for his self-respect. One hour she swore to herself that he was a human brute, and would never be anything else—the next she felt that such a character had not been since the palmy days of ancient Rome and Greece, and that he was a compendium of all virtue, Pagan and Christian. When Edward was at last thoroughly enthroned in her mind, she began to suspect others. She thought over all that Edward had said, and came to the conclusion that there was some secret arrangement between him and her father and Dr. Andreos. They had bound him down in some way.

‘I will find out,’ she thought; and there-upon set her woman’s wit to work.

Edward followed Harman along the corridors, sick at heart. This was to be his last

interview with the only woman he would ever love—and perhaps the final one.

As he passed the picture of the victim going into the dark valley of the upas-tree, all the events of that evening when he had seen it first, and the terrible day which followed, flashed across him. How light-hearted and unknowing he was then! And now—he felt even as that victim in the picture might have felt: as if he were going to his doom.

Harman tapped at the door. A feeble voice said 'Come in.' He saw his love, pale, dressed in white, lying back on pillows upon her blue sofa under the window. She looked more dead than alive, as she had looked when she fainted and he laid her on the bank by the roadside. At the sight, at the recollection, he felt transported with

love, and misery, and anger towards those who had arranged to separate them. He was in the humour to forget everything but Amy and her wishes—to be betrayed into any breach of trust. He went towards her, while Harman discreetly disappeared. He knelt by her. He took her in his arms, he said broken, passionate words. Then he cried, ‘You are ill!’ almost wildly, in his unhappiness.

Amy, fixing her big blue eyes upon him, said slowly, ‘I know *all*.’ It was a master-stroke. It went home.

‘Then they have told you—cold-blooded—cruel—what are they about? It would have been so much better for you not to have known! When was it? Did they tell you——’

Edward was about to add ‘everything,’

when a sudden angry flash of Amy's eyes, a violent blush she could not repress, betrayed her. To find her suspicions that there was something hidden, some plan to prevent her marrying Wrighton, suddenly verified, threw her off her guard.

'You are not speaking the truth,' he said, recoiling and looking at her as a recording angel might look, severely loving; 'and, Amy, there must be truth, as far as can be, between you and me.'

'No one has told me anything,' said Amy. 'But do you think me a fool? Your behaviour is not consistent. So of course I know there is something hidden from me. I know papa and the doctor have made you swear and vow all sorts of things.'

'Nothing—but what is right and just, and good for both of us.'

‘They treat me like a baby!’ cried Amy angrily.

‘Prove to me that they are wrong, my darling—I will treat you as a sensible, noble woman. I have given my word not to speak to you of certain matters. That is all, on my honour. I believe this was done that your love and trust should be subjected to the severest test. If you really love me, you will trust me implicitly. You will know that whatever I may do, or may not do, will be because I am powerless at present to act, or not to act, as I wish. Tell me—can you trust me?’

He took her hands and gazed yearningly into her eyes. His emotion beautified him. At that moment, the most uncompromising critic could not have classified Edward Wrighton as ugly.

‘Trust you? Till I die!’ said Amy earnestly.

If she did not love him as girls of her age love some self-constituted hero, she knew that she admired and revered him; though why, she would have found it hard to explain. That moment almost consoled Edward for the approaching separation.

‘How happy I will make you!’ he enthusiastically said. ‘Amy, I feel—I know that I shall be able to. And it will be the highest sort of happiness, working together for the poor and the sick—a happiness only to be earned by previous suffering.’

He did not mean to break his word. But he said enough, and left enough unsaid, to give Amy a fair idea of some impending and crucial separation. Then, when they parted, he held her in his arms with such

wild passion, and as he broke away and rushed from her room, his face looked so white and drawn with anguish, that at last she guessed. Perhaps this was the last time they would meet !

Harman found her weeping hysterically. She had never seen Amy so utterly broken down. Amy flung herself upon her neck. Animosity and anger were all gone.

‘I shall never see him again!’ was her incoherent cry.

At last Harman had succeeded in quieting her, and began caressingly to assure her that she was mistaken. Of course she could see Mr. Wrighton—would see him just when and where and how she pleased, if she really wanted to. When had her papa denied her anything that she was sure she ought to have ?

‘I know I could make papa do what I wished,’ she said, raising her drooping head languidly, like some slender flower beaten to earth by a storm. ‘And the doctor too. It is not that, Harman. It is a strange feeling—an awful feeling. I feel that he is good, but that we ought not to marry, for *I am not.*’





CHAPTER IV.

THE AUNT'S DIARY.

MISS NORMAN, spinster, elder sister of John Norman, was one of the old school. She kept a diary.

When her brother wrote her the letter of invitation, she had but just arrived in England from the south of Europe, where she had been detained by the illness of her maid. She had gone at once to stay with her bosom friend, Lady Gwendolen Trevor, wife of Mr. Hugh Trevor, of Ilkley Hall, —shire. This was the lady Miss

Prudence Norman had intended to be her sister-in-law, ever since they were school-friends at Miss Dane's renowned school near London (a seminary where none were received but the daughters of noblemen or baronets, or landed proprietors). Here the two girls had gained the nicknames of 'Queen Anne' (whom Prudence Norman was supposed to resemble), and 'Marlborough,' perhaps because Lady Gwendolen, shrewdly clever, took the lead in all things, and completely managed her friend.

The friendship had lasted, although Miss Norman had not yet forgiven her brother for not marrying Lady Gwendolen, nor Mr. Trevor for having usurped his place, as she considered it.

Years after, Miss Norman opened the diary she kept about the time her brother's

letter arrived, and found its contents so painful that she locked it away in horror in an old chest in a lumber-room.

The painful entries began under the date of May the 12th. They ran thus :

‘ *May 12.*—Once more at dear old Ilkley ! Dear Gwen, aged, greyer,• but gay and clever, as she always will be. We are alone. I have the same big room overlooking the park, with the same old furniture and the four-post bed, which Trevor does not fail to make his daily time-honoured joke about. Bless the man ! He seems, if anything, to grow more empty-pated. How anyone can live with Gwendolen, and hear her talk and be like that, I cannot understand. But men have no minds. As Gwen says, with a grimace “ My dear, they are unfortunately

necessary evils." There will be more necessary evils next week. There is to be a houseful of visitors, and any amount of gaiety. Croquet-parties, dances, and the performance of an operetta, composed by some young lord.

‘What a delicious change from Nice, with that burning, shining glow blinding one the instant one put one’s nose out of doors! I hope I shall never inhale orange-blossom and roses again. It was not smelling the sickly scent; it was breathing and assimilating it. Here outside I see green—acres of green. The tall trees flooded with green, and the low-lying grassland gleaming silvery with millions of daisies, or golden with a yellow mantle of buttercups. Curly ferns and close-clinging ivy caress the big trunks of those leafy elms. Cloudlets sail gently

across the blue sky—which is a calm quiet blue—not that coppery ultramarine that glared at you in the South as if the universe had an evil eye, and that was it.

‘Gwen and I sit out among the daisies under a big cedar and talk. Poor Gwen! How I pity her, with that foolish little man tied to her apron-string!

‘*May 15.*—A thunderbolt! *A letter from John!* Actually proposing I should go and stay there to take charge of his daughter! She was a pretty, spoilt little thing. But *that woman’s child!* And my vow never to stay under his roof again! I had half torn the letter in my dismay, when I thought better of it and locked it away. I could not go down to breakfast. I sent Masham down with an excuse, and she brought up a tray to me. Presently Gwen came in.

““You have had bad news,” she said, with that old pretty peremptory way, which makes one feel how superior she is. “Come, tell me.”

‘I told her. Then, as she insisted, I showed her the letter. She looked thoughtful. Then she suggested that I should not be hasty, even in thought. We would both think the matter over quietly, and meet to talk over the result of our meditations in her room at afternoon tea.

““I shall send you for a long drive, quite by yourself, after luncheon,” she said, as she left me. “I always go if I have anything special to think out. Nothing like rapid motion to produce ideas. Friction produces sparks, you know. Now, keep quiet, and do as you are told.”

‘Little fear that I should not follow

Gwen's advice! She is a very goddess of Reason.

‘*May* 16.—What a day was yesterday! I felt in a turmoil. I went for the drive, but no ideas came, except that I wished John had not asked me this. We can never be friends.

‘At five I went to Gwen's room. It is the most delightful snuggerly. She has a fancy for white, green, brown—the colours Nature chooses so often. The walls are grey canvas, roughly but artistically painted with water-plants, particularly bulrushes; at the base, lilies are painted lying on still water. The ceiling is grained wood—yes, grained wood—and it does not oppress you as you would think; and there is a white thick carpet spread upon the grained floor under the small brown wood furniture.

This afternoon a chill May easterly wind had set in. There was a small wood-fire on the dogs on the hearth. The little silver teapot was set down there—not smothered in one of those musty-fusty newfangled cushion things. Gwen jumped up and settled me in one of the soft white chairs by the fire.

“ One more letter to catch the post, and I have done,” she said, returning to her writing-table.

‘ Her maid silently brought in hot toast. (She is a jewel of a maid, with greater skill and fewer crotchets than Masham.) Then, watching Gwen’s delicate brown profile, with that clever nose distinct against the grey-white wall, and enjoying the warm silence, fragrant with pleasant reminders of tea and toast, I listened to the cawing of the rooks outside and waited.

‘The letters were sent off; then we sat opposite each other and talked. I had nothing to tell.

‘“*Nothing?*” asked Gwen significantly.
“Don’t you relent?”

‘I told her of my vow.

‘“Perhaps, if it were not for that, I might go,” I said.

‘She looked at the fire, stirred her tea, then said, with a sudden flash :

‘“Oh, there is a way out of that.”

‘It nearly took my breath away. She proposed that she and I should invite my niece here for the projected gaieties.

‘“It is plain her father wants her to come out and see a little life,” she said.
“Then she is an heiress, and must be suitably engaged before some ineligible comes upon the scene and snaps her up.”

‘She talked so convincingly, that soon my duty was plain to me. I must help this child—after all, my nearest downward tie to life. My own niece! But still, I must not break my vow. It would be a bad beginning.

“We must get her here as soon as possible,” said Gwen decidedly. “If necessary, I will fetch her.”

‘Then we composed—or rather, she dictated—a letter to John. What a different letter to any I should have thought of this morning! If anything, I fell in with his views too eagerly. That doesn’t do with a Norman. Agree with a Norman, and he or she gets bumptious and puts on airs. Dictate to a Norman, and the Norman cringes. I know my own defects. (So does Masham, who has managed to be a

perfect autocrat with me. She knows I could not do without her, that I am actually attached to her.)

‘*May 19.*—I *thought* as much! My letter to John was too amiable. He wrote back quite in the lord and master strain. If Amy were to accept Lady Gwendolen’s very polite (!) invitation, I must first go to Artro, then escort her here. But even before this, he must know further particulars as to Lady Gwendolen’s proposed guests.

‘I was desperately indignant. I did not wish to show Gwen the letter. But she got it out of me. She did not seem to feel what in her place I should have considered an insult.

“My dear,” she said, “your brother is perfectly right. You cannot be too par-

ticular about your children, especially about an only child. If I had a child, I should be a perfect nuisance to my fellow-creatures, with my scruples and fears."

'(I wish I could have Gwen's "public spirit.")

'We were just going to walk in the apple-orchard when she saw the letter. She told me to go and wait for her. She would bring her visitor-book, and then we could go through the list.

'The apple-orchard is a three-cornered plot between the flower-garden and the kitchen gardens. Gwen had told me it was looking lovely—but when I closed the wooden door and turned round, the sight took my breath away.

'Bloom heavy on the boughs like snow. But snow scattered with haws or holly-

berries. Pink spots shone redly in the sunshine, which fell upon the grass through the blossoms like light cast through a sieve. Fell upon what? Upon a carpet of frail anemones that made the tall grass look as if it had been showered with tiny rose-leaves. Beyond, there was the high red-brick wall, comfortable, stolid, absorbing the sunlight and casting it back upon the sweet white glory. There was a silence, an innocence, that made me think of little pink babies by the font in their white robes, or tender girls going veiled to the altar (it is a curious custom, by the way, to show by symbol that if *not* veiled from what is in store for them, poor maidens, they would not go). I was feeling touched, almost overcome, when Gwen came.

“ You are but a great big old child after

all," she said, patting my shoulder (for she reads my thoughts).

'Then she arranged two camp-stools on the grass under an apple-tree, and spread open a great morocco volume that looked like a music-book upon her knee.

'I knew the book. Gwen registers her new acquaintances, with the results of her observations upon them, leaving a wide margin for after corrections, and plenty of space for further records.

"Have you your pocket-book?" she asked. "Ah, that is right. Now take notes for your letter to your brother."

'Then she explained that she planned a houseful of visitors somewhat as she planned a dinner-party.

"The *pièce de resistance* first," she said. "The principal guest. This time it is

necessary for us to fête Sir Wentworth Syme. Hugh will contest the borough with him against the Liberals—Brown, the retired brewer, and Carson, the solicitor, you know.”

‘ Then she turned to letter S in her book.

‘ “ *Syme, Sir Wentworth, Baronet, Liddle Hall, —shire, and 100, Berkeley Square, London. — Middle-aged. Married. Two good-looking daughters. One handsome son, gone to the bad. Lady Syme, husband's echo, broken down by trouble about son. Sir Wentworth is sternly Conservative. Dislikes frivolity and sports of all kinds; supports fox-hunting and the like on principle. Ditto, whatever savours of old customs in the Ritualistic movement. Likes a quiet game of whist after dinner, and a little music. Wait, there is a marginal*

note somewhere. *Eleanor Syme, 22, shy, sings well, pretty clear voice. Pupil of Riposta.*

“ I made that entry after a dinner-party where I had a confidential talk with Sir Wentworth,” she added. “ That led to this operetta business, don’t you see ?”

‘ I shook my head. Gwen turned to letter B.

“ *Beville, Lord Arthur.—Moderately young, unattached. Second son Marquis of Doume. (Here is a note : Elder brother Viscount Helfont, now dangerously ill and not likely to recover.) Musician, composer of operetta ‘ The Rose Queen.’ Accomplished, charming.*

“ And what is more to the purpose, likely to take his brother’s place,” she went on. “ He is a highly eligible *parti*. He

might take a fancy to Nellie Syme. Mind, I only say *might*. I am not one of those who say to themselves 'John This shall marry Mary That ; or Robert So-and-so is the right husband for Clara So-and-so.' My dear, young people won't take what you give them—they like to pick for themselves. So I have some other eligibles here :

“*Ferrara, Marquis de.—Old Venetian family, moderately wealthy. Proud, touchy, somewhat insignificant, but fine eyes and faultless get-up. Girls in society don't care for him.*

“But Sir Wentworth would, I fancy,” she said. “The old name would go a long way. Still, it is quite possible Nellie may prefer my third bachelor.

“*Reed, Reverend Robert.—Oxford man,*

with moderate views. One of the Reeds of Denby. Private means, and holds a comfortable living in Somersetshire, which is in the gift of a maternal uncle. Fair, tall, prim, blushes a good deal, is somewhat troubled with his own personality, and is given to unnecessary self-defence. Musical. Sings well.

“He might be our tenor. Our bass is that handsome young painter that the Duchess of Z—— has made such a fuss about, Ximenez. He is only half Spanish, but his voice is splendid.* That makes four bachelors. Of course, Ximenez is not eligible, but he is scarcely likely to presume. Besides, none of my girls who are coming are heiresses—Eleanor Syme, Mary Syme, Blanche Trevor, my husband's niece, Lady Florence Ferrers——”

““ And *Amy* !” I suggested in consternation. “ Why, it will never do——”

““ My dear ! Cannot you look after her ?”

““ If she is as headstrong as her father, no !”

““ Then I will,” said Gwen placidly. “ *I* will take the responsibility, and you may blame me for whatever happens, because nothing ineligible *shall* happen. But now our single people are disposed of (except, of course, Riposta—funny little man, who conducts and arranges the operetta ; he is nobody), let us look to our married folks.’

““ *Exham, The Dean of.—Good old fellow, somewhat prosy, and fond of a good menu. Still almost as good-looking as when he married Laura Bellisle.*” You remember, Prudence ? Laura Bellisle left Miss Dane’s just when you and I arrived.

She was Lord Richmond's sister ; not handsome, but a nice girl. Well, she went home and fell in love with her brother's tutor, and after a tremendous row they were allowed to marry. He was a curate then, with no prospects ; now he is dean, and down for the next bishopric. You will like both the dean and the deanness.

“*Belmont, Earl of—(late John Clifford.)* You remember him ?”

“That handsome young man who was engaged to his cousin ? Why, did she not die, and he got into trouble about an opera-dancer——”

“Prudence ! What a bad memory you have ! Opera-dancer, indeed ! The girl—I forget her name, Alexina or Alethea something—never was on the stage in her life ! She sang splendidly, though. Some old

baronet—a cousin of the Lord Belmont who died a year or two ago—died and left her his money. It was not a bad match, exactly, you see. She is coming too. A most fascinating woman. All the young men run after her. But she adores her husband, who is rather cold and haughty: not nearly so nice as he used to be. They have one child, Lord Robert, a wonderful boy. I asked them to bring him. She won't leave her child. Now, don't look disgusted. Lady Belmont is a perfect gentlewoman, although a little eccentric, as geniuses will be. Let us make our list:

“*Sir Wentworth Syme*—(I put them in *my* order, you know; not in order of precedence:

“*Lady Syme.*

“*The Misses Syme (2).*

“*Lord and Lady Belmont.*

“*Lord Robert (and tutor).*

“*The Dean of Exham (Dr. Jakes).*

“*The Hon. Mrs. Jakes.*

“*Lady Florence Ferrers.*

“*Miss Blanche Trevor.*

“*You and your niece,*

“*Miss Amy Norman.*

“*Lord Arthur Beville.*

“*Rev. Robert Reed.*

“*Marquis di Ferrara.*

“*Senor Ximenez, and*

“*Signor Riposta.*”

“What will you do for bedrooms?”

I asked.

“Oh, the girls don't mind those top rooms. And the young men will have the new rooms over the ballroom.”

‘The ballroom is a great gallery lately built. The men are hammering away now, making the stage for this wonderful set-out next week.

‘*May 24th.*—Heigho! I am leaving with a strange oppression of spirits. To-morrow I shall be at Artro. The day but one after, back again here with my niece, Amy. I cannot help feeling as if all the free happy life were over, and I was to be saddled by some regular “old man of the sea.” Masham is cross, too, at these sudden journeyings.

‘People are arriving. But I have asked to remain in my room till we leave this afternoon.

‘*May 27th.*—To relate as shortly as I can the experiences of the last two days:

‘It was an uncomfortable journey.

London dirty and hot on a steamy, spring-rainy day. The country under a wet blanket of warm mist. But as we neared the Welsh coast, a fresh sea-breeze blew the blanket right away back over the mountain-tops, where its grey fringe caught awhile before it disappeared for good.

‘Here was the little Artro station. The same old shed. (John might afford a better structure, with *his* income, I should think.) On the platform stood a girl, alone.

‘Oh, what a lovely thing Amy is! Slight, willowy, graceful, with a little head you want to take between your hands and kiss, and such a pink and white skin, such *blue* blue eyes that you feel as if she must have some fascinating odour, and you must inhale it—the sort of feeling that comes to you at the sight of a fresh rose, or a bank

of violets, or a great bunch of white lilac. You don't know which comes first, the sight or the scent—as you feel when you watch shooting, and hear the pop and see the puff of smoke.

‘What would Gwen say to that burst of enthusiasm? I did not think there was so much sap in this withered old trunk. But sometimes those old hollow tree-trunks suddenly put forth sprigs of young green. When Amy's kisses came on my old cheeks, I felt something like a grandmother at the sight of her first grandchild.

She carried me off. Outside the station was her little open carriage. She drives two skittish thoroughbreds with perfect coolness, though they prance, and shy, and snort, and toss their heads like wild horses of the prairie. I will say that everything

at Artro is in perfect order. The grounds, the great empty house, the servants, *even John*. Who has done it? Order can't have established itself.

'John and I met each other, carefully on guard. We touched each other's cheeks—well, scarcely touched. We were so much relieved when this familiar public greeting was well over, we were quite disposed to be pleasant and agreeable.

'Then Amy took me off to my sumptuous apartments, full of new-fangled gimcracks, and hovered about me like some humming-bird. She seems so sensitive, shy, fragile, I don't foresee the slightest difficulty in managing her.

'Dinner came. Then we played whist, with that hateful hunchback, Dr. Andreos. Fortunately, I played with John. I did

not mind losing. (John invariably loses, because he *won't* count the cards, and *will* think of something else,—his quarries or his farms, or his horses, or any mortal thing but the game, all the time.) I acknowledge that I dislike my best cards being trumped, my leads being ignored, and my worst suits being aggressively led up to; but I dislike Dr. Andreos far more.

‘I distrust the little mass of deformity. He may be very clever, have made a name, and all that. But no one knows who he is, or where he came from. My opinion, from the first, was that he is an adventurer, and has fastened upon John like a leech.

‘This opinion was confirmed when I discovered what the state of affairs at Artro actually is. Amy is transparent. I soon found out that she is fretting. A young

doctor has been here during that man's absence, and he and Amy fell in love. Of course, it was an impossible thing, although the young man is Sir George Wrighton's nephew. But the right way of settling the affair would have been to be straightforward, to tell the young people at once they could not marry. That doesn't happen to be this little wretch's way ! Oh dear no ! I should be greatly astonished if that hunchback had ever told a plain truth in his life. John let out that "*Dr. Andreos*" mean scheme was to allow the engagement on condition that the young man accepted an appointment to go away for two years, and give his word not to tell Amy until after his departure. The poor young fellow fell into the trap. He went without Amy's knowledge. Then he wrote to her from Liverpool. Of course,

the shock has greatly affected her. In her place, I should have given up this moral weakling, and should decline to speak either to my father or *that creature*. But she is soft as melted wax. I am quite thankful she is in our hands—Gwen's and my hands—now. At least, we shall not confine the dear child in a web of deceit.

‘As soon as I found what had been going on, I was on my guard. Deceit must be met with deceit, as sword with sword, pistol with pistol.

“Of course she is safe in my hands, and I thoroughly endorse your opinion that the idea of such a match is simply outrageous,” I said to John.

‘(The hunchback was there, staring with those needle-eyes.) John, poor fool, brightened up; he believed me. I don't think

humpback did, quite; but he let us go. We departed: I, Amy, the two maids (my cantankerous Masham and that delightful Harman), and any quantity of trunks.

‘I felt like a general leading a victorious army. I waved my handkerchief defiantly out of the window. Those two men looked anything but comfortable when they said good-bye. In fact, they looked decidedly uncomfortable.

‘Once safely off, I could begin to take possession of my new charge. We talked at length. I sympathised with Amy fully. That is all a nature like that really wants. If she has complete sympathy in her feelings and thoughts for a time, reaction will soon come.

“‘Let her get into Ilkley Hall,” I thought, “full of gay young people of her own class,

and this boy-and-girl nonsense will soon be over and done with !”

‘ I was right.’

(Here occur some blank pages. Miss Norman had evidently too much on her hands to keep a regular entry of her doings, to record her new responsibilities and the incidents of this visit to Ilkley Hall, until they were in the past.)





CHAPTER V.

‘COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS
*
BEFORE.’

A SOFT sunset evening. The red light floods the long, low grey stone building, and sparkles upon the rows of windows. Ilkley Hall lies in a flat green park. The clumps of trees are unstirred by any breeze. The smoke from the great kitchen chimneys rises steadily into the air. The birds are twittering sleepily in the shrubberies. The shadows lie still and dark upon the daisied lawn.

Within, Lady Gwendolen and some of her guests are taking tea in 'the oak parlour'—a long room, with carved oak ceiling, and many narrow windows that open upon the flower-garden, with a view beyond of the lake—formerly a moat—and the park. The room is all brown and green. Brown floor, rich green carpet, and heavy velvet curtains. Tiers upon tiers of books of all tints of brown, from the deepest chocolate to the palest fawn. Bronze busts above the shelves. Carved, straight-backed oaken chairs, low library lounges, velvet sofas; here and there some wild-beast skin, with half a head and glass eyes, is spread before a library table or in front of some sofa.

Lady Gwendolen, from the corner of a sofa, dispenses tea from the many little silver teapots spread upon the low tea-table

before her. She is dressed in a conventional grey silk dress. The affectation of age in the simple dressing of her hair under her rich lace cap actually lends additional youth to her slender brown aquiline features. She has bright, honest eyes under her arched brows; small hands, tiny ears. Looking at her, as she sits there, self-possessed, active, her high forehead smooth as a young girl's, her quick eyes glancing from guest to guest with busy tact, you would say, 'What an intellect! there must be honour, justice, experience, truth—all that one should rely upon, here.' But no one would think—
'What a heart!'

In the opposite corner of the sofa lounges a young matron. She is pale, with a rounded face full of sweet expression, from the soft big eyes to the drooping corners of

her pretty lips. Her plump though well-proportioned figure looks still larger than it actually is, in her white cashmere morning-gown. She sips her tea absently. She looks absently from one to the other as each speaks. As she turns her head, the golden-brown hair that is simply gathered into a knot at the nape of her neck gleams in the reflection by the several mirrors of the last sunrays of to-day. This is the young Countess of Belmont, formerly Althea Biron.

Pop, bang-bang! Then frantic cawings outside.

The little black group of men in the park yonder, where the flying feathery smoke tells of some bird murder, either intended or perpetrated—means that Mr. Trevor, Lord Belmont, Lord Arthur Beville,

and other of Lady Gwendolen’s male guests are rook-shooting.

A trio of girls, who have been chattering, teacups in hand, at the end of the room, go to look out.

A pleasant-looking old lady, the Hon. Mrs. Jakes, puts up her eyeglass and glances towards them. The Dean of Exham, her husband, a handsome white-haired and full-faced old man, removes his spectacles, through which he was scanning the morning’s *Times* (if possible, to extract one drop more of precious news), and says:

‘Those little pops are significant. If I am not mistaken, they mean rook-pie. Now, if there is one thing I confess to liking better than another, Lady Gwendolen, it is rook-pie. There is a flavour about a well-nourished and well-dressed rook which

might even distance a satisfactorily prepared venison pasty. In Scotland, I have a weakness for stag's liver, grilled quickly—soon after killing. In the South, I find nothing more palatable than that nice little unobtrusive Mediterranean crab, properly bouilla-baissed. But there is an old English flavour about a genuine, handsomely developed rook, which is worthy of John Bull in his most fastidious dining moods.'

The girls look at one another. Lady Gwendolen is just assuring the dean that his tastes shall be remembered, when a shadow flits across the window outside, then a little dark man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, stands, hat in one tightly gloved hand, a bouquet in the other, and bows low to the party within.

'May I come in?' he asks, with a

foreign accent. This is the Marquis di Ferrara.

Just as Lady Gwendolen, nodding, rises to open the window, a little boy, dressed in black velvet, his curls flying, comes tearing across the lawn. Lady Belmont says 'Oh!' with a jump. Her young son is frightened at something. He rushes in, quite forgetting his usual courtly ways (for little Lord Robert is taught to imitate his ancestors in politeness), and makes for his mother as a young rabbit scuds to his lair.

'My good child, what is the matter?' asks the Dean of Exham somewhat irritably.

'He is hurt!' says Lady Belmont, looking him over with terror in her large eyes.

The marquis appears excitably concerned. He lays aside his hat and bouquet, and

almost tears off his gloves in his eagerness to assist the beautiful, gifted Lady Belmont he admires so much. Lady Gwendolen says 'Come, my little man, speak,' and the rest crowd round sympathetically. But Lord Robert is only overcome because when he gave a scream his father boxed his ears.

'But *why* did you scream?' asked the dean, adjusting his spectacles and looking severely at the child.

He made a little grimace, for he was a sensitive, girlish lad. Then it came out that a rook had been half killed, and had hopped and flapped as if cawing for mercy, and Lord Arthur had wrung its neck. Then he had screamed, and his father had boxed his ears.

'And do you not know, my boy, that to put the creature out of his misery was the

kindest thing Lord Arthur could do?" said the dean, in his sonorous pulpit voice.

Lady Gwendolen, who was an anti-vivisectionist, here spoke up somewhat warmly. She believed that the instinct to protect animals was inherent in human nature, etc., etc.

'I never mean to kill anything when I grow up,' chimed in the boy, throwing his arm round his mother's neck and looking straight at the dean.

'Then you will have nothing to eat, my boy,' returned the dean, thinking that Lord, or rather Lady Belmont, was ruining this child, who must some day occupy a responsible position. 'I suppose you know nothing of the fatted calf, or the quails in Egypt, or the vision of the Apostle where

a quantity of feathered creatures were lowered to him from heaven ?

‘Yes, he does. I give him his Bible lessons myself,’ said Lady Belmont, stroking her son’s curls in that half-dignified, half-apologetic manner which gave her a peculiar charm to outsiders, but which was particularly irritating to her husband.

For he knew as well as she did that this secret shyness came from the many snubs she had received. She had been a simple country doctor’s daughter, had appeared in public as a concert-singer, and had studied with the intention of adopting the operatic stage as a profession.

He knew this, she knew it, and the world knew it. They all pretended to forget it, but the more they all pretended, the more bitterly the fact seemed riveted in

his memory. Lord Belmont had gradually worked himself into a humour which interpreted each attention to his wife as a slight. The life of Lady Belmont, formerly Althea Biron, was not a pleasant one.

'Ah, indeed; well, that is quite right, Lady Belmont,' said the dean, in a scarcely encouraging way.

Then the marquis, who had the natural antipathy of a loyal son of the Pope to an heretical Church dignitary, flashed one scornful glance towards the reverend gentleman, who had placidly resumed his paper, then offered a choice bouquet of white spring flowers to Lady Belmont.

He had spent his afternoon in quest of these waxy hyacinths, tender tuberoses, and gardenias. He had ridden to a mansion some twelve miles away, where the old lady

of the house had the indulgent liking for the courteous young nobleman which the aged naturally feel for those in whose creed respect for age is one of the special items. He had confided his reverential admiration of Lady Belmont to her.

She, an optimist, saw nothing but chivalry and young romance in this, therefore enjoyed taking him through the hot-houses, and, with the obsequious aid of her head-gardener, superintending the arrangement of a bouquet.

And as he rode away, waving his hand and glowing with a Southern enthusiastic pleasure, the old lady even gave a sigh to what might have been, if in her youth she had met an Italian nobleman instead of that dear good man, the late squire, her husband. (What might have been? Perhaps

a thousand big sighs instead of that one little one !)

But the bouquet ? As the marquis offered it her, Lady Belmont shrank back, and gave a doubting, inquiring glance towards her hostess.

'Take it, my dear,' said Lady Gwendolen (who considered Lord Belmont 'a jealous brute'). 'They are charming ; the marquis has such good taste.'

Then she smiled kindly at them both, and went to talk to her girl guests. She felt quite equal to managing all her heterogeneous brood of visitors, male and female.

She was mounted on the steps, looking out books for those three girls who were clustered 'round her ; Mrs. Jakes, knitting with huge wooden knitting-needles, was talking—in a monotone carefully pitched

not to disturb her husband's reading—to the tall, plain, but good-natured-looking Lady Syme, wife of the autocratic Sir Wentworth (who was out walking, somewhere); the marquis had assumed the seat by Lady Belmont vacated by the hostess. Little Lord Robert had wandered away, and was playing with a silver paperknife on one of the writing-tables, when Lord Belmont came in.

The boy disappeared under the velvet tablecover. This annoyed the already angered father. Then there was his wife accepting the attentions of 'that little foreign fool.'

'It is in the blood—in the blood!' he unkindly thought, as he went towards the sofa. 'What else could one expect from the daughter of Dr. Biron?' Then he saw

the bouquet lying in his wife's lap. 'Where did you get that thing?' he suddenly asked in her ear.

She handed it to him, blushing as if she were guilty. The marquis, secretly pleased, rose, bowed, and went across to Lady Gwendolen. Lady Belmont explained; feebly, because when her husband spoke in that tone of voice she knew he was angry. And she loved him so much, that his anger was her one terror in life. She finished with: 'Do have some tea, John?'

It was the wrong thing to say. Lord Belmont disliked tea, and he fancied she was concealing something from him.

'Tea!' he exclaimed contemptuously. Then, with a dark look towards the table-cover, under which his boy was hiding from him, he went out.

Miss Norman and her niece must soon arrive. This young heiress was an object of great interest to Lady Gwendolen. She knew that her friend Prudence was satisfied with her niece. She had written that one note, announcing by which train they would arrive, evidently in capital spirits.

‘I will leave you to judge Amy yourself,’ was the only allusion to the young girl; but from this allusion Lady Gwendolen gathered that she must be so undeniably charming that there could be only one judgment in the matter. Had there been a doubt what her judgment would be, Prudence would have written pages of praise.

‘I expect the operetta will lead to more than *one match*,’ she was thinking, as she handed down strictly proper novels to the

young girls. 'Well, these things must be!' Then she stopped. There was the sound of carriage-wheels.

Amy had enjoyed her journey. Whenever she thought of what she chose to call poor Edward's 'treachery,' she felt heart-sick. But she liked to hear her aunt defend him, which Miss Prudence did, honestly, if only because 'that hunchback' was Edward's enemy. During the long journey, Miss Norman senior had quite talked herself, as well as her niece, into the belief that Edward Wrighton was a real hero.

'Not that that makes him any more a fit match for you in the eyes of the world,' she impressed upon her. 'And we who have to live for the world are bound to obey its laws. It is a penalty we must pay for

our comforts and luxuries. Poor people can be free. It is only right they should be ; to balance their lot.'

Her aunt's philosophy was the theme of Amy's thoughts as her eyes dreamily watched the fields of young green corn, the flowering hedges, the pretty low cottages with their climbing ivies, rose-bushes, leafy gardens, their heavy thatches grey against the red sky.

No ; Edward was not of her stratum in society. And transplanting him would cost her much. She sighed—as the carriage with the quick-stepping horses drove rapidly through the park to the porch of the big house, where Lady Gwendolen was standing, slim, aristocratic-looking, unaffected, and nodding and smiling welcome.

Amy liked her at first sight. And she ?

As Amy stepped out, delicate, lovely, a long silk wrapper over her muslin dress, a great hat shading her beautiful young face, Lady Gwendolen felt a thrill of surprise, elation. From her many talks with Prudence all these years, she had gathered that this Dresden china nymph was not only an heiress—she knew Euclid through and through ; she had studied and could discuss the inner mysteries of chemistry with the greatest chemist of the age—she had a lovely voice and was clever in music—it was almost too much ! No wonder Prudence had indulged in eloquent, pregnant silence !

‘My dear, you are most welcome !’

Lady Gwendolen, quite startled out of her natural self-possession, seized Amy’s hands and warmly kissed her on both cheeks. (She thought it was like kissing satin.)

‘Now—*are* you tired? I suppose you must be! But you won’t mind coming into the Oak-room and seeing some of us? We have been *so* anxious to see you. You will want some tea. Of course you are shy: oh yes! you see, this is your first outing with strangers. But we shall not be strangers long, I hope. You must do *exactly* as you like, my love, you know—*exactly*. You have to consider no one here but yourself.’

Then she led her off to the Oak-room, with tiny prancing steps, that with Lady Gwen were a sign of unusual content. Miss Norman followed, with a little swagger of her portly form, her firm chin just slightly tilted. She felt herself the chaperone of the belle of Ilkley Hall.

The dean, his wife, Lady Syme, Lady

Belmont, and the three girls in the Oak-room, each thought Amy a beauty.

The dean rose and smiled as he said, ‘I am glad to make your acquaintance, my dear,’ looking as he seldom looked welcome to anything feminine, except perhaps to some delicate hen-lobster or early spring chicken.

‘A lovely girl!’ whispered his wife to Lady Syme, who gave a dissentient grunt as she inspected Amy through her eye-glass.

‘Rather in the milkmaid style,’ Lady Syme remarked.

This newcomer might interfere with her little plans for dear Eleanor and Mary. Lord Arthur would do so nicely for dear Nell, both being so musical. And if Mary could really *like* that little marquis, the question of creed might be got over with Sir Wentworth, she believed. Now, this

girl, with her pink and white prettiness and her millionaire father, was likely to upset everything.

Lady Florence Ferrers, a dark, dashing young person, and the somewhat ordinary Syme girls, tried to be cordial, but were inwardly dismayed. Lady Belmont loved beauty, therefore admired Amy, and won her at once with her sweet, somewhat girlish manner.

Then the dressing-bell rang, and the party dispersed. Lady Gwen took the travellers to their rooms herself.

‘Your aunt must apologize for these ante-diluvian arrangements,’ said the hostess, as she introduced Amy to Miss Norman’s large room, with the solemn old four-poster and the huge mahogany furniture. ‘This is her taste, not mine.’

Then she showed her lovely young guest an inner chamber, all pretty modern satin-wood and pink silk and white muslin and lace, where Harman was already busily unpacking.

It was scarcely so luxurious as Amy's abode at Plas Norman. Still, as she looked out upon the still ranges of giant elms, where the rooks were flying and circling, breaking the green silence with their noisy cawing, she felt a sudden rise in her spirits.

'Harman,' she said, 'I shall be happy here.'

'Of course you will, dear,' said Harman, from out a mass of flouncing muslins she was struggling with; mentally adding, 'and if I am not very much mistaken, you'll soon forget all about your poor stickleback.'

Here Miss Norman bustled in, anxious about Amy's gown. She had small confidence in provincial dressmakers, and shook her head as Harman unfolded smart silk dinner-dresses—selecting in preference a gossamer embroidered India muslin.

Arrayed in this, with a necklace of single costly pearls round her white throat, and white gloves and fan, Amy looked bridal. Some one else thought so, as the girl, in a new mood of expectant excitement, was too restless to wait for her aunt, who was still in the hairdressing stage—and ventured out into the unknown wilds of the strange house alone.

After passing through corridors hung with pictures and decorated with cabinets of rare old family china, Amy came upon a curious nook. A nook she was destined to

know well later on. A corner with a projecting bay-window, commanding a view of the most open part of the park. A window-seat was curtained and cushioned, and on the rich soft cushions crouched a white figure. It was Lady Belmont.

She happened to turn her head as Amy flitted by, and by some subtle sympathy the girl paused. Miss Norman had told her niece Lady Belmont's life-story on their journey, and Amy was interested.

'I was thinking of you,' said Lady Belmont, in her half-shrinking, half-dignified manner. 'You look—almost like a bride. Do take this' (here she offered Amy a white bouquet). 'Oh, you must not say no to my first request! There! now you look quite like a bride. Poor child——'

Althea stopped suddenly and completed

her sentence with an eloquent look and a sigh.

Amy felt obliged to accept the flowers. They were choice—those blossoms the Marquis di Ferrara had spent his day in acquiring. She admired them, asking Lady Belmont the names of those unfamiliar to her. Then, hearing her aunt's voice, she flitted away, down the circular staircase lighted by a glass dome—a staircase of broad marble with gilt balustrades, so unlike the twilight stairways at home—the bouquet in her hand. Miss Norman must have passed some other way. Amy found herself in the round hall, the centre of that portion of the house, alone.

It was a white, crimson-carpeted hall. Around were statues, ghostly in the twilight. In the centre was a young Hercules strang-

ling a snake. Opposite, was the stern robed figure of a contemplative sage, chin on hand. As she looked, a strange sensation came to her that those blank marble eyes flashed a sudden warning glance.

'This is silly,' she said, looking fearfully over her shoulder at the sudden sound of a distant door-slam. 'I wonder which of those doors leads to the drawing-room.'

Tall brown doors seemed endless, both here and in the circular corridor. Amy glanced at the massive chased handles, and touched them with the tips of her fingers.

She might open the wrong door, and find herself in Mr. Trevor's sanctum. What an introduction to her host! No, rather return to her room, and let Harman procure her a pioneer.

There was one of the doors ajar. Pushing it gently open, she found herself in the outer hall. The big bell was just before her.

‘It will be quite time enough to go to the drawing-room when they come to ring for dinner,’ she thought.

It was an ordinary hall, with a great hearth and a round table in the centre. Against the walls were hat-stands and oaken chests for carriage rugs and wraps. Here and there stood cases of stuffed birds—birds shot by Mr. Trevor during foreign travel; there were a few old pictures, and on either side of the great mantelpiece hung modern portraits of the master and mistress of the mansion. Mr. Trevor leaning back in an armchair, holding an eyeglass; Lady Gwendolen standing slim and straight in a

fur-trimmed gown, book in hand, quite a nineteenth-century Portia.

Amy looked at stuffed birds, portraits ; glanced out of window into the pillared veranda ; noticed the last pale pink flush of sunset in a lilac-blue sky above the dark belt of shrubbery—then turned suddenly, fancying some one had come in through the half-opened door by which she had entered.

No. She was still alone. The dying light gleamed strangely on some old Venetian mirrors, hung in the corner in the form of a cross.

She had not noticed these. They were very handsome. She went to look at them. They were hung so high she had to tiptoe to see herself. She had her hands poised ready to smooth her hair, when she recoiled with a low cry of horror.

A face was looking at her through the glass.

Fancy? Impossible! Heart-beating, chilled, she supported herself against the hall-table and was staring wildly at those terrible mirrors, when a footman came in with lamp and tapers to light up. Then, trying to recover her equanimity, she asked him the way to the drawing-room.

He put down his lamp and escorted her. Amy suddenly found herself in a great crimson, brilliantly lighted room. The dean was standing talking to a short, grey-haired little man, Mr. Trevor, on the hearthrug. The girls and some men, who all looked alike to her dazed eyes, were chattering and laughing, turning over music at the huge Broadwood piano, by the light of those pretty shaded lamps on either side the music-desk.

Lady Belmont was sitting listening, with downcast eyes and icy expression, to actual nothings, uttered with outward devotion by the Marquis di Ferrara, who did not happen to look up when Amy entered, and did not, as Lady Belmont intended, see the final destination of his bouquet.

But Lord Belmont, who was standing, somewhat disdainfully uttering sarcastic remarks amid the small-talk of Lady Gwendolen and her middle-aged lady visitors, who occupied the sofa and easy-chairs near the hearth, did look up—and felt a sense of relief when he saw 'that foreign fellow's' flowers in the hand of the pretty, innocent-looking girl.

'She looks scared, as if she had seen a ghost,' thought Lord Belmont.

But he felt good-naturedly towards the

'shy little thing,' and there and then made a brotherly vow to be of use to that child, if ever she wanted help.

Poor soul! If ever she should want help! Lord Belmont little knew when he made that careless mental remark anent that simple unknown girl, how tragical—how terribly earnest—would be its fulfilment.

Amy was so pale, that even her aunt thought her seized with a sudden panic of shyness, and found her a chair in the corner, screened by her own ample figure, to-night clad in her favourite ruby-velvet gown.

Amy was indeed so completely hidden, that the remainder of the visitors came in and she could not see them.

She sat thinking. What *could* that

have been? Whose face was it? Had she seen a ghost?

She could recall the face perfectly. Indeed, at that moment she felt in her new excitement as if that face would come between her and everything she looked at till she died; and that it would haunt her dreams.

It was unlike any other face she had ever seen, except in a picture—an engraving in some book. As she sat meditating in her corner, she remembered. There was a steel engraving of a bust of Nero in her ‘*Roman History.*’ *That* was the expression.

The face she had seen was pale, handsome—a young man’s face, with fair curls and large, lurid eyes. It was the hate in those eyes, the cruel vindictiveness of those firm, curved lips, that had terrified her

even more than the fact that the face had no business there, thus, at all.

At first her surprise had prevented her from thinking. Now she began to reason. Perhaps one of Mr. Trevor's guests had passed at that moment, and his face had been reflected in the Venetian glass—reflected, and most likely distorted.

Growing calmer, she craned her neck to peep between her aunt and Lady Gwendolen as they sat side by side on the sofa before her. Several people had come in. But she saw no face at all like that face.

Suddenly the dinner-bell rang ; the butler threw open the folding-doors communicating with the dining-hall. A soft waltz began. The small orchestra engaged for the coming operetta were to play each night at dinner, also for dances. They were good musicians ;

and as Lady Gwendolen had taken great pains to lodge them in comfort among the better cottages in her model village, with the Ilkley Arms as their headquarters, they were in a good temper.

Amy, loving music, and having only heard an orchestra worth hearing about three times in her life, was listening entranced, not noticing the couples pairing off through the open doorway, when Lady Gwendolen tapped her arm with her fan.

'Lord Arthur Beville will take you in to dinner, dear,' she said. 'Lord Arthur Beville—Miss Amy Norman.'

Amy glanced up. Then her delicate colour fled and her face grew white.

A tall, broad-shouldered young man bowed pleasantly to her. He had the form of an athlete, and his chiselled face

and golden-curved head might have been the model for an Apollo or an Antinous.

He fixed his great blue eyes sweetly upon Amy. He had seen the sudden blanch, and knew the reason.

As he escorted this 'nervous young creature' into the great dining-room, he said :

'I am afraid I frightened you, Miss—Norman. It was you, was it not, who looked so scared in the hall, about half an hour ago ?'

'Oh! it *was* you!' said Amy, with a sigh of relief. (Then she gave a searching, upward look. She could hardly realize that Lord Arthur's smiling, gentle face and the horrible countenance she had seen in the Venetian mirror were one and the same.) 'But where *were* you ?'

They were taking their seats at the long dining-table. This was decorated with flowers in silver épergnes, and lighted by waxlights in tall silver branches, each flame veiled by a tiny crimson globe. The waltz had died away as Lady Gwendolen stood at the head of the table. Then came a brief hush, followed by the sonorous voice of the dean, intoning grace. After that, sudden chatter, life, movement, clinking of heavy silver ladles as the soup was quickly served out at the sideboard, and the striking up of a pretty 'selection' from a new opera.

'You asked me where I *was*?' What a sweetly pitched voice was Lord Arthur's, as he inclined his fair head towards his young charge. 'You don't know the—let us say, joke—of the Venetian mirrors? No? Well, thereby hangs a tale. You

must know that Lady Gwendolen has a great idea of having bachelor's quarters—of shutting us poor inoffensive single men out of the Eden of Ilkley Hall. (Lady Gwen has a horror of men, Miss Norman, especially of us single ones, who have not been educated by the ladies.) Well, this pseudo-prison allotted us is in a new wing, over the ball-room; and the plan of the old house necessitated our quarters being connected with the main building by a narrow interior staircase. This could not be left in the dark. The architect managed to light it by slits in the outer wall, where the staircase kindly approached the outer wall. But after a sharp turn was necessary to connect our place of banishment with the hall, we should have had to grope our way in the dark, or be lighted by lamps in the broad

daylight, unless daylight was procured for us from somewhere. The nearest somewhere was the outer hall. Lady Gwendolen objected to a window let into the hall which looked like a window. So some astute personage suggested an arrangement of small mirrors, that would be picturesque, while the centre mirror would be the required glass pane. I was passing just now, and happened to look through that pane. I saw something—well, I will not say what I saw.'

'Whatever you saw was certainly not gratifying. If that was your face, it was a very unkind face, indeed,' said Amy boldly.

She had said the words involuntarily. They were the truth. She had been unpleasantly impressed. Meanwhile, the unpleasant impression was being rapidly dis-

pelled by her surroundings. The great dining-room at Ilkley Hall was a miniature Tuileries chamber, all white and gold ceiling, pillars and walls. The long, wide table was a marvel of nineteenth-century appointment, yet the solid épergnes and candelabra of past sober days were pressed into the service. While the sight was gratified by the glitter and artistic arrangement of graceful works of art, coloured by rosy light, the hearing was soothed by soft music. Then there were so many people; there were learned masculine heads, pleasant, matronly faces. There was bright manhood and lovely girlhood.

‘You eat nothing,’ presently said Lord Arthur, with a grave solicitude.

‘How can I?’ asked Amy, clasping her hands upon her lap.

She was feeling the first exhilaration of brilliant society. As she saw, heard, felt, a subtle intoxication was creeping into her very blood.

‘Lady Gwendolen told me you were a little mountain daisy,’ said Lord Arthur. ‘This is new to you, naturally. But try and be practical. The *coup d’œil* is deceptive. Let us analyze the company present. They are all small—infinitesimal—miles below your standard, I expect. Look at the dean! Lady Gwen is obliged to let him take her in to dinner every other day, or he would be offended. Look at him—he is taking half the asparagus. A minute ago he was looking at the *menu* card with a frown. He was afraid the asparagus would be handed to some one else first. Do you see Lady Syme, sitting next

him? Isn't she like a good-tempered guinea-pig? She munches just like one. Notice her—she takes everything. They say she is in despair about her only son, who is everything horrible which must not be mentioned to a young lady—her despair does not seem to affect her appetite. Those fair girls who are giggling across that small brigand-looking mannikin, who says he is an Italian marquis, are her daughters. They intend to have earls for husbands at the very least.'

Here Lord Arthur paused to help himself to fowl. His last speech made Amy redden. She thought him fearfully rude.

'How do you know they want to marry earls?' she said boldly. 'Girls are not like that.'

Lord Arthur laughed, and changed the

conversation. He told Amy each one's story, as he knew it. The dark, frowning, but handsome little man, who was not talking to anyone, was the well-known Spanish painter, Ximenez.

'He has the voice of a saint,' he added. 'I cannot say of an angel, because there is the effect of past and gone human passion in it. He is my baritone. You have heard of the operetta that is going to be done? It is my operetta. You must not judge it severely. If it sounds pleasantly to you, that will be because Riposta has managed it all. Riposta is a conductor at the Royal Italian Opera. He has deigned to approve of my amateur efforts, and has helped me. He will manage everything. He arrives to-night.'

Then ensued a conversation on musical

subjects. The 'mountain daisy' seemed to know very nearly as much as Lord Arthur himself, and acknowledged that she could read music at sight, and could sing.

'Only after a fashion,' she said, half alarmed at Lord Arthur's eager glances. 'I have never sung before people in my life.'

Here Lady Gwendolen rose, and the ladies flocked out like a swarm of soft white birds. In rising, Amy had stumbled ; Lord Arthur had held out his hand, had touched hers. As he did so, she faltered. There seemed a sudden weight at her heart. The room swam. She followed Lady Florence Ferrers' sweeping amber train, feeling confused, changed, she knew not how, why, or when.

The ladies subsided gracefully into the

wide armchairs and broad sofas in the crimson drawing-room, and began to talk scandal or dress in low tones. One or two took up photograph albums, and dozed over them. Miss Syme—Eleanor Syme—went to the piano, sat down, and tried over her airs in the operetta in *mezza voce*, accompanying herself with the soft pedal down. She was hoarse, undoubtedly hoarse—and alas! to-night, Riposta, who had no patience with amateurs’ passing indispositions, would arrive. She had noticed Lord Arthur’s attention to the young heiress at the dinner-table, and had told herself that she must play her cards boldly. There must be no shilly-shallying. As the ‘Rose Queen,’ with Lord Arthur for her lover in the play, she would naturally have opportunities. She liked him. He was hand-

some, and his elder brother, Lord Helfont, could not, they said, recover. It was a great prize. She must strain every nerve against the little rival who had the great, cruelly great, start of a colossal fortune.

Meanwhile, Lady Gwendolen had made Amy sit down between herself and Lady Belmont. She had caressed and petted her, had admired her 'simple white gown'—her pearls, the unfashionable bunch of fair curls Harman was so fond of.

'I think you must have been very much like this dear child, Lady Belmont. You see, you were both brought up in the country,' she was saying, as the door opened, the tea and coffee trays were brought in, and Miss Norman sailed up in her crimson velvet gown, from the opposite corner of the room, where she had been talking about

'the child's' wealth, and her unsophistication, and her youth, with the Hon. Mrs. Jakes.

Lady Belmont smiled, a sad, far-away smile. She seldom cared to reflect upon old times. Still, to-night, the allusion was less painful, because her husband had given her a fond approving glance at dinner-time. This had quite consoled her for the sparkling anger which had glittered banefully in the black eyes of the little Marquis di Ferrara, when he saw his bouquet lying between Amy and Lord Arthur upon the dinner-table.

Amy went away into a corner. She sat down in a low chair. She saw the graceful women in their delicate dresses flitting about against the gorgeous crimson of the red drawing-room as if in a dream.

The oil-paintings in their massive frames, the heavy chandeliers, the enormous piano—none of these seemed real. The past—home, father, Dr. Andreos, her villagers, poor Edward—these were phantoms. She felt Lord Arthur's touch upon her hand. She heard his voice—it had seemed to linger in her ear. Wherever she looked, she fancied she saw two faces, side by side—the cruel face in the glass—or rather, behind the little window—and the beautiful, placid, searching expression upon the glorious countenance of this new, fair hero.

Why had he been so kind to her—a stupid, insignificant country girl? He, who was not only a nobleman, but renowned for his cleverness, his musical gifts?

She had been wondering some minutes,

when the door opened and Lord Arthur came in.

He looked around anxiously, then went straight to Lady Gwendolen, who was seated at the tea-table. Ostensibly fetching and carrying cups, he whispered :

'I was too worried to stay with the men over their claret. Of course you have noticed how hoarse Miss Syme is to-night ?'

Lady Gwendolen had not noticed.

'Get her to sing,' said Lord Arthur, sitting down by his hostess and nursing his knee. 'I won't ask, or she might suspect that I have noticed. You go presently and ask her to sing the aria of the "Rose Queen" where the Countess forgives her, and you and I will sit here and judge.'

Lady Gwendolen looked grave. The

whole party was arranged for the chance of certain young people liking each other, and coming to certain agreements which would please parents and friends. Eleanor Syme, prima donna collectively and individually, getting hoarse, was to her like the first favourite of a great race suddenly falling lame, to sportsmen who had backed the creature heavily.

Inwardly exercised in her mind, outwardly no one could have guessed that Lady Gwendolen's arrangements were not sliding into their several grooves. She smiled; was, as usual, actively engaged in seeing after her many and different guests.

Tea over, she gave orders to the aged butler (who had lived as footman in her family when she was in long-clothes) to

light up the billiard-room. Then she went across to the group of girls at the piano.

‘This being really our last evening before that arbitrary little Riposta takes possession of us all, and makes some of us very uncomfortable,’ she began, ‘I thought we had better spend it in the billiard-room. Those who like whist’ (with a glance towards the footmen, who were wheeling out and arranging the card-tables) ‘will stay here. Might I ask for just *one* little song, dear Eleanor? It would be *so* kind of you.’

It was difficult to resist Lady Gwendolen when she chose to exert her powers of persuasion. Eleanor Syme felt that she had taken cold, and feared that she was hoarse, when Lady Gwendolen suggested

‘that beautiful aria of the “Rose Queen” when—what is his name—the lover, you know, discloses himself.’ It was an air easy to sing, in so far as the voice was concerned. But it was dramatic, and Eleanor Syme was not gifted royally by Nature for the drama.

Lady Gwendolen returned to where Lord Arthur was sitting, staring absently at the Aubusson rug and the embroidered footstools—‘naturally put about,’ his hostess thought, but in reality absorbed in certain new plans—he, who was nothing if not a born *intrigant*.

‘I have managed it,’ she half-whispered.

Then she sat quietly by him, as Lady Belmont, always good-naturedly ready to play accompaniments for the merest musical tyro, spread her white satin skirts over the

music-stool, and delicately struck Lord Arthur’s harplike chords upon the instrument.

As Eleanor Syme lifted up her shrill soprano voice, now bereft of whatever charm it possessed by real huskiness, Lord Arthur winced, and fell into a drooping attitude that meant despair.

‘She *may* be all right after a day or two’s rest,’ suggested the anxious Lady Gwendolen in his ear.

Eleanor Syme’s performance was certainly discouraging.

‘If she sings like that, Rippsta will give up conducting; I know he will.’

Lady Gwen looked piteously around. It would be bitter to her to be disappointed. The operetta *must* be ‘done.’ The invitation cards had been sent out

ten days ago. The entertainment was already the talk of that quarter of the county. Perhaps Lady Belmont—before the thought was matured, she whispered an eager suggestion to Lord Arthur.

‘My dear lady, Lady Belmont might take the part of the Countess. But the Rose Queen herself is a light soprano. Lady Belmont would not *look* the part, either. No; I cannot tell what to do. We shall have to send for a professional, I expect——’

‘Oh, no, no!’

Lady Gwendolen would have anything—any arrangement rather than that. It would be detestable to the dean, and unbearable to Lord Belmont, who eschewed the professional world of art as thoroughly as his uncle, the late earl, had encouraged it.

Here the men came in from the dining-room, drowsy or hilarious. Whist-parties were formed, and while the older guests were cutting for partners, the young people went off to the billiard-room. The handsome Lady Florence Ferrers played well, and Blanche Trevor, her inseparable friend, liked to mark when her beloved scored. Eleanor and Mary Syme could canon in a quiet, ladylike way, and were always ready for pool or pyramids.

Miss Norman left Amy, forgotten by most of the assemblage, in the corner where she was looking through 'Childe Harold,' illustrated, and joined the whist-players. Lady Gwendolen had accepted Lord Arthur's arm. She was going to play propriety in the billiard-room. Once there, she did not notice that her escort had disappeared.

He went back to the drawing-room through the saloon. The door communicating between the rooms opened upon the corner where Amy was sitting. Amy was dreamily staring at Byron's portrait—the frontispiece—wondering whether the most attractive of fallen angels had ever worn that expression of sarcastic beauty, when Lord Arthur quietly came in and sat down on a low stool close by her.

‘Bitten?’ he asked, glancing at the whist-
tables to ascertain if he had been seen. No
one had noticed his entrance.

‘Bitten?’ repeated Amy.

She had instinctively drawn back. She
shook her head. She did not understand.

‘The Byron mania, I mean. Most young
ladies have it, I am told—like the measles,
or the whooping-cough.’

'I am not very fond of poetry,' said Amy, drawing herself up. 'I was merely looking at the engravings—at his portrait.'

'You prefer music,' said Lord Arthur gently. (This girl was evidently a spoilt child. He must change his tactics.) 'I knew it when I first looked at you.'

Then he fixed his eyes—those eyes which had assisted him to subdue so many weak women—sentimentally upon her, admiring her fragile beauty as he might have approvingly inspected a specimen of delicate Bohemian glass. 'She looks brittle—as if you could smash her with your finger and thumb—or ethereal, as if you could puff her away with a breath,' he thought, and Amy ranked higher in his estimation because of that fragility. 'I am going to ask you a great favour, Miss Norman,' he

said very humbly. 'So great a favour that I am afraid you cannot grant it. I want to hear you sing.'

He drooped his head, and Amy saw nothing but the curly mass of golden hair and the long, white fingers laden with diamonds that were nervously playing with one of her embroidered muslin flounces. This slavish yet familiar manner was new to her. She felt oppressed—as if she could have rushed to her aunt, who seemed to have forgotten all about her, or to Harman, who was doubtless supping contentedly in the housekeeper's room.

'I cannot sing, my lord,' she said, almost defiantly; then, thinking she had been brusque, adding, 'And if I could, there is to be no music to-night. Look at them! Who would disturb whist-players, in earnest

like that? And to-morrow this Italian artist will be working you all hoarse with rehearsals and practices, and things.’

Lord Arthur assured her that he would rather even forego hearing her voice than disturb those whist-players.

‘Especially that poor, dear Lady Belmont,’ he said satirically. ‘Look at her! She would applaud an earthquake if it would only put an end to to-night’s whist. His lordship objects to her being with the young people. Ah, you are interested! Well, I promise you I will tell you the whole Belmont story, which few people know the rights of, if you will sing to me now——’ Then he persuaded and coaxed. There was Lady Gwendolen’s boudoir upstairs. She had given him *carte blanche* to use her pretty little piano, made to suit the room,

and specially tuned for this visit—whenever he pleased.

‘You will come upstairs and sing to me,’ he said at last, commandingly.

Almost to his surprise, although he had often scored a success with the yielding sex by assuming the dictator, Amy meekly accepted his arm and accompanied him.

‘This shy bird has been accustomed to obey,’ he thought, as they went along the corridor to the staircase leading to Lady Gwendolen’s rooms. ‘I wonder whether old Norman was the autocrat, or that miserable little hunchback?’

He knew quite well that Amy was Miss Norman of Plas Norman, Artro. He knew that the Dr. Andreos who had taken the lead in the mysterious illness of his brother, the Viscount Helfont, was Amy’s tutor and

friend. But he chose for reasons of his own to make Amy's acquaintance in seeming ignorance of her actual position in the world and her immediate surroundings.

As Amy went upstairs, her hand on Lord Arthur's arm, she felt vaguely, deliciously, that she was passing out of actual duty-life into the land of exquisite dreams. Sounds, scents, sights attracted her with a new attraction. Meanwhile she felt a guilty sense that all this was wrong. Why? she asked her conscience, almost defiantly. Conscience made no reply. It seemed to have collapsed, to be silenced.

Amy felt, as Lord Arthur held open the door of Lady Gwendolen's boudoir, as if she were retrograding into a species of depravity. After Lord Arthur gently closed the door, she stood near it, feeling miserable, as he

went to the shaded lamp on the little writing-table and turned more light upon the white room, with its artistic lily-decorations and its heavy wooden ceiling.

She watched this man who had, before she knew what she was doing, made her obey him, with a sort of fascination. As he struck a match and lit the candles at Lady Gwendolen's tiny piano, she felt one wild impulse to rush away, to escape; then she felt rooted to the spot, almost as if she were changed into a young tree and her body grew out of the floor where she reluctantly stood.

'Come,' said Lord Arthur, seating himself at the piano. 'Sing a scale.'

And Amy obediently sang. Her voice came out pure, true, sweet, in spite of herself. It was as if another will had taken the place

of her own, and as if she had yielded her control of her powers to some one else.

It was a fresh voice, with the plaintive *timbre* of youth. Young birds twitter in this pathetic tone. It is to be heard even in the mew of a kitten, in the whine of a puppy. One would think that young creatures knew by instinct that they must suffer, and appealed to the grown-up world to help and shield them.

‘If her knowledge is up to her voice, she will do,’ Lord Arthur mused, as the sweet treble notes gratified his ear.

The scale finished, his fingers wandered over the keys and brought out those tender little modulations which seem to issue from natural musicians alone. He was meditating. Suddenly he wheeled round upon the music-stool, and said :

‘Your voice is all right. Now I must find out what you know.’

‘I know nothing!’ said Amy, alarmed.

She had been listening breathlessly to his little improvisation. Then she explained, almost incoherently, that all her knowledge was the village schoolmistress’ and organist’s, aided by her own plodding efforts.

Meanwhile Lord Arthur had placed the MS. score of his operetta upon the desk. He proposed to play one of the songs; then Amy was to sing it. She listened with all the force at her command. She sang the melody without a hitch, without faltering.

Then he tried her with another, with a similar result.

‘You have the ear of I don’t know what!’ he exclaimed, springing up. ‘Lady Belmont must look to her laurels! Don’t

look so startled, my child. You have to take the part of the “Rose Queen” *vice* Miss Eleanor Syme, disabled. You will do it. I shall devote myself to coaching you up.’

At first Amy hardly understood that Lord Arthur Beville, the distinguished amateur composer, was choosing her for the title-rôle of his operetta. Such a proceeding did not come within the range of possibility. When it flashed upon her what this really meant, she was overcome with dread and confusion. She begged and expostulated. She was quite sure Lord Arthur had over-estimated the little she could do. She pleaded to be let off.

‘And if I could manage to sing the thing by hook or by crook, as they say, how could I *act*? I never acted in my life. I never

saw anyone act !' she cried at last, with a spasmodic effort at self-assertion.

'Then all I can say is, you are an actress born !' said Lord Arthur. He had been coolly sorting his music, seemingly paying as little attention to Amy's expostulations as a bird-catcher to the flutterings of his newly caged captives. 'Why, you are acting now !'

'I never was truer in all my life !' cried Amy, hurt.

'My dear child, how you jump to conclusions ! Who said that to *act* was to be *false* ? Analyse the term. To act is to embody your emotion, to let the outside world know what you feel. The natural actor is the truest human being. Those who always look alike, speak alike, are the liars. Those who are transparent, who let

the soul shine through their being by attitude, speech, gesture, are true to nature, although they are *actors*.’

‘But if I show my own feelings, it does not follow that I can imagine feelings I haven’t got, and show *them*,’ said Amy, nervously twisting her fingers.

‘You have evidently very little faith in my opinions or in my capabilities,’ said Lord Arthur coldly. He had risen, and was closing the piano. ‘Of course you may refuse. But there is no time to wait. You must really decide now. If you decline to help me, say so frankly, and Riposta and I will arrange something.’

‘If you think I *can*——’ began Amy timidly.

The idea of refusal—of refusing this extraordinary being any request—shocked

her, somehow. She could not bear the idea.

‘That is not the question, Miss Norman. The question is not whether you *can*, but whether you *will*.’

‘I will do anything you like!’ cried Amy impetuously.

Then she flushed up, trembled, was confused, and looked lovelier than ever.

‘That is a good child,’ said Lord Arthur, with an attempt at warmth.

Then he offered her his arm, and escorted her back to the drawing-room. She was half-ashamed, half-fearful. He was silent, almost annoyed that he had expended more effort than was necessary to gain his point. He felt like a man who, desiring an inaccessible fruit, had procured lassos and had brought ladders to rear against the tree,

and who had, while reaching to clasp the fruit, seen it tumble to the ground, knowing that if he had shaken the tree instead of expending effort, it would have fallen at his feet without further trouble.

Lord Arthur did not like easy conquests. When he gravely said good-night to Amy at the drawing-room door, she was not even beautiful in his eyes ; and as he went off to the smoking-room he wondered whether his game was worth the candle.

'I can always back out, that is one comfort,' he consoled himself, as he threw himself into an easy-chair in the deserted bachelor's den, and lit his cigar. 'There are plenty of well-dowered girls about who are not quite so idiotic.'

If poor little Amy could have known his thoughts, as she went back into her corner !

She picked up her volume of Byron, which was lying on the floor. But although she turned over the pages and looked at the engravings, she could not have told what she was looking at.

In a short time the whist-players arose, the billiard-room party returned. The trays of biscuits, sodas, liqueurs were brought in. Then the guests said good-night, and retired.

‘You had better go to bed, my dear,’ said Lady Gwendolen to her husband, in the tone which meant, ‘You *must* go,’ when the last guest had been smiled upon during his retreat. ‘It is ridiculous for us both to tire ourselves, with all these late nights coming. Riposta’s train comes in at 11.30. There! I hear the wheels; the brougham is just going for him. I must see him

to-night, of course. The whole entertainment depends upon him, and our *prestige* depends upon the entertainment.’

‘I will go, my dear,’ said Mr. Trevor, meekly stifling a yawn. ‘Have you everything you want? I hope the train will not be late. Good-night.’

Then he too took himself off, and Lady Gwendolen was alone. As soon as she was alone her smile vanished. She was disappointed. She had quite believed that Lord Arthur and Eleanor Syme would be brought together; that Sir Wentworth would owe the satisfaction of seeing his daughter firstly Lady Arthur Beville, secondly Viscountess Helfont, and thirdly and lastly the Marchioness of Doume, to her, Lady Gwendolen’s, arrangements.

Lord Arthur was now, of course, only

the second son. But authorities in society gossip declared that the rumours of accidental poisoning in the case of Lord Arthur's elder brother, Lord Helfont, had been circulated to conceal the fact that he was a miserable creature, eaten up with consumption.

'It is in the family, my dear,' had said a certain countess, whose voice was to Lady Gwendolen as the voice of one of the Fates. 'They may talk as much as they like about their fatal title, and all that stuff. The fatality in the Doume family is king's evil—cancer in one generation, consumption in the next. Young Lord Helfont is riddled through with tubercles,' added the oracle, speaking of Dr. Andreos' patient as if he had been a prominent tower exposed to a siege; 'literally riddled through.'

Lord Arthur Beville and Eleanor Syme would have been such a capital couple. 'The Symes are such a healthy stock,' thought Lady Gwendolen regretfully. But she was not one to waste tears over 'spilt milk.' She soon accepted her embryo defeat, and began fresh plots and plans. If Lord Arthur would not bite, there was the little marquis. He had an accommodative temperament, kaleidoscopic in its powers of changing. He was annoyed with Lady Belmont for having given away that bouquet. Such a vacillating heart was easy to catch in the rebound.

'Two disappointed ones—natural sympathy—he is handsome and sympathetic; she is pretty, and doesn't want to be an old maid,' thought Lady Gwendolen.

There she sat, busily appraising the capa-

bilities of her guests ; plotting within plots, planning within plans, till a vigorous peal of the stable-bell and the crunch of wheels on the gravel told her that Riposta had arrived.

She smoothed her hair, arranged a bright expression by the aid of the glass, and was ready for him when he came in.

‘Milady, theess is indeed a pleasure,’ was the smiling Italian’s delighted salutation.

Riposta was short, squat, bald-headed, active to restlessness, buoyant, sanguine, yet with staying power which was inaccessible to discouragement. The little black-haired, black-eyed man, with the gay carelessness and sunshiny brightness peculiar to the Italian, the child of the sun—had worked his way up to the principal London

conductorship by the very force of his elastic, happy temperament.

Now, he came upon Lady Gwendolen like something reviving—a breath of new life. He had been hard at work all day, and had then taken a somewhat fatiguing journey, but—

‘Tired, madam? Ah! but de servants of de public, dey most not be tired, you see. You see?’ he repeated, rubbing his hard little hands. ‘We always ready for work, we. We accustomed to our work, we. Just like you great lady, accustomed to talk to the cook about de dîner. No talk, no dîner, eh? And we? No work—no money; dat worse, eh?’

Riposta shook his head and laughed, hugely amused at his own ideas. One of his charms was his excessive amusement at

the faintest trifles, especially his own little sayings.

He shook his head at brandy-and-soda, but accepted claret. While he was sipping and smiling, the drawing-room door opened, and Lord Arthur lounged in. He was the embodiment of discontent; his curls dishevelled, his hands in his pockets.

At a glance, Riposta saw that something was wrong. Something had 'gone askew.' But he did not show what he thought. He chattered away, and most of his chatter was of Lord Arthur's operetta. It had been his commission to have the orchestral score arranged. The orchestral score had increased his opinion of Lord Arthur's work, and he said so. But while he talked, his quick eyes danced from hostess to composer. Yes; there was a cloud in that operatic sky.

‘A nice thing!’ said Lord Arthur, at last.
‘Our prima donna as hoarse as a raven.’

Riposta’s face fell. Lady Gwendolen expostulated. The girl had a slight cold. She was now in bed with a poultice on, and had imbibed quantities of gruel. Perhaps to-morrow her voice would be as clear as a bell.

Riposta cautiously suggested Lady Belmont.

‘She so kind, so good lady!’

Then he related an anecdote, how Lady Belmont saved the performance of the Amateur Mendelssohn Society, by taking a part at a moment’s notice. But Lord Arthur obstinately declared that his light soprano *rôle* was utterly unsuitable to Lady Belmont.

‘Besides, if there is any disagreement

with the Symes, and the younger one takes her sister's part, I shall want Lady Belmont for the Countess,' he added.

'But there must *not* be any disagreement with the Symes,' said Lady Gwendolen, barely concealing her annoyance. (Of course, Lord Arthur was her 'great card' to amuse her guests, both resident and neighbouring; but had not entertainments, everything, been planned to cement the friendship with Sir Wentworth, the well-known politician? Offend the Symes! It must not be!)

'I will take no opinion on the subject of Miss Syme's hoarseness, except Signor Riposta's,' said Lady Gwendolen decidedly, rising to retire for the night. 'And until you have gone through her part with her to-morrow morning, Riposta, I must beg that no allusion may be made to the child's

trifling—ridiculously trifling, cold. She has worked like a slave, and I would rather postpone the performance than that she should be disappointed.'

Lord Arthur coldly said that if the performance were postponed, neither he nor Riposta could be present.

'We do the thing at the Duke of C——'s on the third, and begin our rehearsals next Monday,' he said, with a glance at Riposta to uphold him.

'Certainly,' repeated Riposta, who was accustomed to take his cue from the leading amateur, whose patronage was worth more to him than that of a score of Lady Gwendolens. He knew Lord Arthur had some plan, which of course he, Riposta, was in duty bound to carry out. So he spoke cautiously, and listened with all his might.

But he did not guess what his patron's plan really was, till Lady Gwendolen had sailed upstairs, and at the sound of her closing door, Lord Arthur, saying, 'A word with you,' led the way silently into the smoking-room.

'The girl's hoarseness is the luckiest thing that could have happened for us,' he began. 'I took her through the part, and she was a perfect stick. At the best of times her voice is a poor, squinny apology for a voice ; and as for filling that ballroom—you haven't seen the ballroom ? An enormous place, very bad for sound—it would be like the squeak of a mouse.'

'Ah,' observed Riposta, in a tone of expectant approval. 'But who is to take the lady's place ?'

'I have a substitute ready, only I shall

say nothing to Lady Gwendolen till you have satisfied her that it is impossible for Miss Syme to sing.'

Then Lord Arthur described Amy.

'A most beautiful girl, fresh, powerful voice ; musical to her finger-tips, and sensitively obedient. She is more like a musical instrument than a human being with a will of her own.'

'A charming young lady, indeed, milord ! But surely, have I met her ?'

'No,' said Lord Arthur shortly.

He never troubled himself to explain his plans to Riposta, whose duty it was to do as he was told, without asking questions.

'I shall carefully avoid seeing you alone to-morrow morning,' said Lord Arthur, after some conversation about the general

arrangements, rehearsals, etc. 'Your verdict must be positive, but unbiassed. I shall work with the new singer pretty well all day, and shall run up to town in the evening to see about her costumes, and to let you all fight it out by yourselves.'

Riposta laughed, said the pretty little cats had better scratch his bald head than claw his lordship's classic curls, and retired by way of the back staircase, as Lord Arthur told him—closing his door with the utmost caution.

Then he looked thoughtful. Scarcely at the prospect of the quarrellings and bickerings that to-morrow would bring forth. No; he was by far too old a stager to mind women, or the worst they could do.

'What this girl?' he asked himself, as he wound up his watch. 'Lord Arthur in love?' (Riposta knew only too well that Lord Arthur had a love that admitted of no rival, and that love was Lord Arthur himself.) 'Whoever she is——' Riposta took out a handful of money and shook his head at it. Even when alone, the Italian pantomimic expression asserted itself. 'Ah! They said at the clubs that his creditors were wild to hear of Lord Helfont's death. Lord Helfont does not die. She must be rich—ah, very rich !'





CHAPTER VI.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

AMY slept—no, scarcely slept—passively existed, wrapped in a dreamy ecstasy, like a chrysalis in its downy envelope. Consciousness came back suddenly—a joyous consciousness, as if a new sun, more glorious than the well-known light-giver, had risen.

She sat up in bed with a sensation as if the old world were dead, and that promised new heaven and new earth were actually born; then slowly, gradually, she realized how, where she was.

A flash of memory brought back yesterday's interview with Lord Arthur in the white boudoir. With the memory came a burning blush. 'If I only were pretty!' she thought, throwing up her arms with a new yearning. Those slender wrists and fragile rosy-tipped hands were not ugly, she thought, as she threw them above her head.

Then she sprang out of bed with a new impatience, and rushed to the glass—all her fair hair, in spite of Harman's careful plaiting, fluffed around her rosy morning-face like a halo. The sweet inquiring face, rising from her white night-dress, only wanted a background of wings to make it like that of an anxious guardian angel.

'I look much more good than I am,' was her comment.

Then she remorsefully remembered poor Mary's baby, her godchild. She had forgotten the poor little creature from the moment she found out that Edward Wrighton had left Artro, to this.

'What a mercy that I have plenty of money!' she reflected. Mary's baby should have everything it could possibly want all its life long.

Glancing at her watch, she saw it was seven o'clock. Too early to ring up poor Harman. But she could not go back to bed; she felt restless. She quietly unfastened the shutters. Golden sunshine streamed in. The birds were singing. The woods were gloriously green. The great trees rose out of golden beds—the fields of yellow buttercups; then spread before her was the lawn, one mass of white daisies.

Lady Gwendolen's sense of beauty had led her not only to pardon, but to admire that snowy carpet.

The instinct to be up and out drove her to her cold bath. Then she dressed, and cautiously opened the door that led into her aunt's room. The room was dark, stuffy, and the air impregnated with some sweet nauseous odour. There was a sound of gentle, ladylike snoring. Stepping across the room on tiptoe, Amy saw her good aunt fast asleep in the shadow of her bed-curtains, her head wrapped in flannel. On the table at her side was a bottle labelled 'Poison—chloroform.'

Miss Norman had been awake all night with that which modern doctors told her was 'neuralgia,' but which she stoutly maintained to be old-fashioned face-ache.

Amy felt she was of no use, so went out. Perhaps it was not quite a usual thing to do, she thought. So she went down the circular staircase very softly. The great hall-door was locked and bolted. She went to the other side of the house, to the garden-door.

The servants were up and about. She heard shrill talking as she passed the kitchen. She was fumbling with the massive lock of the garden door, when a voice said, 'Permit me, ma'am.'

A respectful personage, with a whitey-brown face, whitey-brown hair, gooseberry eyes, who looked as if he had never had an idea of his own, but was born to serve and to obey. He was evidently a valet. He quickly opened the door, then stood aside for Amy to pass out.

She nodded her thanks, and stepped out into the clear, scented morning air, while the whitey-brown man went off to brush his master's — Lord Arthur Beville's — clothes.

Once out into the beautiful free air, she stopped short, as a bird let out of its cage poises before taking flight. She was elated. She felt she should like to explore everything at once. The scene was so different to home—to the endless hills; to the everlasting sea, with its melancholy moan or wild roar; to the long processions of restless silent clouds that fled along the estuary like flocks of disappointed spirits vainly seeking a place of rest.

This place was embodied rest.

Those great, gracefully spreading trees, with gnarled, sturdy trunks; those long

lines of feathery, fluffy green, the coverts that enclosed the park-slopes like a natural fence ; the slim forms of brown deer, with frail antlers twinkling in the distance against the pale green background, the subdued cawings and twitterings of the rooks and woodland birds—all this was different—as different from wild Wales as an educated lady differs from a splendid woman savage.

‘It makes one feel as if one must behave properly,’ thought Amy, as she noted the trim yellow gravelled walks, the pruned laurels. There were gravelled walks and pruned shrubs at Artro. But her life was identified with the scenes outside Plas Norman. ‘Madoc and Butterfly would not do here,’ she thought, with a smile, as she walked primly across the daisied grass, avoiding the clumps of the tender white flowers. Her

shoes were wet with dew. But she was bent upon looking at the still garden lake, formerly the 'moat. She stood by this placid lakelet a minute, listening to the quiet lap of the gently moving water against the stony shore. Then she went into the shrubbery.

The shrubbery was a garden of life. Young ivy twisted itself pertinaciously about the tree-trunks. Primroses burst into bloom among the waving grass. Young creeping things flung their slender tendrils wildly about bare stems, or even among the foliage, in their passionate instinct of self-abandonment. Graceful clumps of pure proud lily-bells stood aloof among the green mass of spring life. Then tiny furred creatures scudded in and out—baby rabbits; and appealing chirps meant nestfuls of infant

birds, meekly but pathetically crying 'Come back' to the parents who were out in the early morning in quest of food.

Amy walked along the narrow paths, watching the living things awaking to a new, short day. The budding underwood came to a sudden end. She found herself in a glade. On a square plat of fine grass was an old oak-tree, its aged branches supported by iron props. It was evidently a very ancient among the trees. She gazed at it with a certain respectful awe, as she might have gazed at some tottering old man, supported by crutches, his tired eyes looking farewells at his surroundings.

While she stood on the grass-plat, wonderingly counting the years since the aged tree might have been a sapling, vaguely listening to the mooing of a pretty young

heifer that grazed just outside the hawthorn hedge, a curious sensation came to her—a sudden thrill of conscious life, an inward burst of joy, a glorious faith in the beautiful world, a feeling that joy was right, and that to be in sorrow meant to be *wrong*. At that moment Amy Norman was absolutely, perfectly happy, and she could not have told why.

‘Something has happened to me,’ she thought. ‘I am not the same as I was yesterday; and I know that I shall never be the same again!’

It was a solemn feeling. She gazed up into the blue sky reverently, as some gaze at the high arches of a great cathedral; only this roof happened to be made by God instead of by man. She listened to the happy natural sounds of birds and insects

and rustling leaves, touched, as others who have not had Nature for their nurse are sometimes touched by human praises and longings chanted by human voices to the Divine.

And while she listened, she stood, as Galatea come to life might have stood, with drooping head and colour rising and fading; and her Pygmalion, coming through the wood, stopped in ambush, watching her. Lord Arthur had found out—at least, the whitey-brown man, his valet, had, in his usual matter-of-fact, wooden way told him—that Amy Norman had gone out into the woods, and he had made a quick toilet and had followed her.

Lord Arthur was a creature with a powerful mainspring: the determination to possess whatever he desired. Cæsar, Napoleon I.,

and others, have been dominated by such an extraordinary internal cause. To discover what that cause is, belongs to philosophy. Weak outsiders, vague speculators, can only recognise its existence, its powers, and their effects.

The beings who are possessed by this out-of-the-way spirit frequently own sharply pronounced, clearly chiselled features; eyes that seem to pierce to your very soul, and transfix it as a naturalist transfixes a specimen with a needle; coldness of manner in the ordinary way, white-heat of manner when they need it for their personal ends. Between the coldness and the white-heat they have a whole storehouse of manners at their command, an armoury of weapons which they test and use at their leisure, according to occasion.

Lord Arthur happened to require a wife with whose description Amy coincided.

He wanted a large fortune. He had overloaded himself with debts, in the expectation that his sickly elder brother, the Viscount Helfont, would die. In the Doume family, as in so many others, younger sons' portions were small. But the eldest sons, the heirs, the Viscounts Helfont (or, as the eldest sons had hitherto chosen to be called, the Barons Beville of Beville), had large incomes. Lord Arthur, and the money-lenders who helped him, had expected he would shortly possess that large income. The physicians had all given up hope that John, Viscount Helfont, could live. It was only Dr. Andreos who had stepped in and held the sickly life—it

seemed by the main force of scientific effort.

‘A curse to the toad!’ Lord Arthur was thinking as he watched Amy, who seemed somehow connected with the idea of ‘that detestable, meddling hunchback.’ ‘A curse to him for his damnable interference! John would be much happier in a superior condition. It is only the unscrupulous who can get along upon this globe—the unscrupulous and the strong. The honest, honourable, weak, inevitably go to the wall.’

Then he came suddenly upon Amy.

She heard the footstep, started, and turned round, to see—the god of the morning? The tall graceful man with the Greek golden head seemed to her as Hyperion. His eyes reflected the morning sky, his smile was like the early sunlight.

‘I saw you going into the shrubbery,’ he said, ‘so I knew it was good to be here. But you are standing on the wet grass.’ Then with grave solicitude he knelt down and brushed the dew from Amy’s little shoe with his coroneted handkerchief, shook his head at the thinness of the sole, and made her thrill, and tremble, and hope, and fear, all at once, by telling her that the possessor of a voice such as hers held a treasure which he or she must guard.

‘You see, one can’t treat a voice like a huge diamond—shut it up in some fireproof safe and leave it,’ he said, with the air of a Mentor, as he escorted Amy back to the house along the gravelled path. ‘In some sense it is a living thing, to be looked after as such. If you own a valuable racer, you have to see to him daily, sometimes hourly.

The same with a rare dog or bird. The same with a voice. Of course, it is some carelessness that has prevented Miss Syme from fulfilling her engagement. If you were not here, my operetta could not be done.'

(He had spoken peremptorily, as a test. He knew what women were. She might have flinched since yesterday. The old aunt might have objected. No one could guess what might not happen, when you had to do with girls.)

Amy stopped short.

'Oh dear!' she said in consternation.

Then she remembered that Amy Norman was—Amy Norman—not to be easily dictated to. She 'pulled herself together' with an effort.

'Your lordship must not depend upon

me,' she said, drawing herself up. 'As I said yesterday, I am not fit to take Miss Syme's place. I am not so vain as to think so.'

'Excuse me'—Lord Arthur stopped short, feeling it advisable to change his tactics and to be sweetly gentle and tenderly brother-like; 'my child, you distinctly said yesterday that you would help me. Not that I would accept your help, dear, if it would trouble you in the least,' he went on, reverentially taking her little hand and placing it on his arm. 'You must trust me, and tell me everything, just as if I were your own brother. I would not cause you a moment's pain for the world.'

'I have no brothers,' said poor Amy, feeling strangely inclined to laugh, or to cry, or both at once. 'So I don't know what you

mean, or what girls say to their brothers, or anything.'

'I thought you knew nothing about men,' began Lord Arthur, in the same tender, protecting way. (He found that this was the right attitude.) 'At least, nothing practical. The brotherless girl has my honest pity. She cannot trust mankind, and honour is the principal ingredient in a true man. I wondered why you did not believe me, Miss Norman! Now I understand, thoroughly. But you will let me be like a brother, won't you? That is to say, you will believe me?'

Then he spoke with earnest kindness. He praised Amy's musical powers, her disposition, her whole self. But he would ask for nothing. She had much in her power

to give, but he would rather not accept anything.

‘The fact is,’ he said, with apparent depth of feeling, ‘you are just what our good hostess said—like a mountain daisy. You know how a wildflower that flourishes even among the rough winds that blow upon the hillside withers at once at the touch of a human hand. I have not the courage to pluck you out of your native state, Miss Norman! And the daisy does not spring up and attach itself of its own accord!’

Amy stopped short. Each word Lord Arthur had spoken had been as an added link to a chain. The tone of his voice, his touch, had a new extraordinary power over her.

‘Does it not?’ she said, with that steely flash of her blue eyes which to physiogno-

mists would have told that this was no ordinary nature.

Strange sensations were playing about her as sheet-lightning plays about the summer sky. She hardly knew herself what it was that she was doing, when she stooped and picked some budding anemones, a frail fern-frond, and then, turning to Lord Arthur, took his coat-lappel between her hands, and with a severe seriousness placed her little bouquet against the rough cloth.

‘The flowers will like being there,’ she said quaintly, almost weirdly, ‘even if they do die.’

Lord Arthur had never in his life been so near a real romantic sensation. The little action had taken him so completely by surprise.

‘You are my child-queen,’ he said, taken aback. ‘And if those flowers are not in my coffin when I am buried, it will not be my fault.’

Then he gravely kissed Amy’s soft hand, and bade her go back to the house alone.

She flitted away across the grass-plat at his bidding. The breakfast-bell began tolling. But Lord Arthur lingered where he was. He felt as he sometimes felt after an unexpected occurrence.

‘What is it all?’ he disgustedly asked himself. ‘What is the use of anything? Why are we called into life to hop, skip, and jump, while some demon fiddles? Life is the dance of death.’

Then the hopeless pessimist sought within himself for comfort in vain. Comfort? Peace? Had he ever felt either influence

since childhood? He stood looking bitterly into the quiet stream under the overhanging branches of the great elms. What came to him? A memory. Memories come at strange, odd moments; at least, so it seems to us, ignorant of the laws that govern the soul. This memory came as strangely as a ghost to a marriage-feast.

It was the memory of a day in his childhood when he had stolen some sovereigns given to his elder brother. There had been a hue and cry. Accused servants had denounced him. 'Nought is safe from that there young devil!' an infuriated man-servant had said. But there was one who stood by the 'young devil' in his disgrace. He had been silently put to bed in a darkened room. There he had lain, imagining hideous vengeance against his 'enemies.'

His childish plots would have enlivened the vilest production printed to corrupt the young. His imagination was a curious soil, which spontaneously produced crops of poisonous weeds.

And as he had lain, anathematising—and planning devilries—he had heard a quick footstep on the stairs, and his elder brother had come in, panting, whip in hand, just arrived home from hunting; a slim hand had come between his neck and the pillow, and a passionate kiss had almost hurt his forehead.

‘Arthur, I can’t stand it,’ a choked voice had said, while hot tears rained upon his face; then presently the old nurse, always severer to the younger brother, had come in to draw up the blinds and tell him he might get up.

‘Because Lord Beville says as it is a mistake, and that he giv you that there money his own self,’ said the nurse, panting and blowing, and casting glances by no means admiring towards ‘that mischievious brat,’ as Lord Arthur was called below-stairs. ‘Which as I hope the Lord will forgive him the lie, and that’s all *I* has to say in the matter,’ she added, as she drily helped the lad to dress.

The time had not then come for the household to adore Lord Arthur—as afterwards they did, from his mother down to the casual stablemen and under-gardeners. No; ‘it is impossible to live without experience,’ was one of Lord Arthur’s favourite maxims.

But why this memory to-day? It must have been that girl’s peculiar conduct which

had brought it back. And not only that memory, but worse, more potent, penetrating recollections.

As Lord Arthur lounged against one of Lady Gwendolen's old elm-trees, he seemed to feel the bony arms of his only brother clutching his neck, as they had clutched when he lately lifted the poor invalid—he seemed to see those great loving eyes riveting themselves upon his face ; he heard the sighing voice, ‘ Arthur, Arthur !’

‘ Well, he is out of it,’ he grimly said to himself—‘ out of it. If not into a better world, which would have just suited him, into a probationary state, all sea and sky. It is only poor devils like I am who have to fight their way, hand to hand, step by step.’

Then he went indoors. Breakfast was served in the great dining-room. Lady

Gwendolen nodded and smiled pleasantly behind the gigantic silver urn and teapots. To-day was to be a field-day for her, but she had all her feminine armour on. She meant each and all to help her. She had begun by peremptorily telling her husband that he was to propose an excursion to Firchester, an interesting old town about nine miles away, to Sir Wentworth. Sir Wentworth was an amateur archæologist, and Mr. Trevor was to tell him of some bits of tessellated pavement and other relics, kept in the crypt under the old church, which no one could date satisfactorily.

‘But, my dear,’ had said Mr. Trevor dismally, ‘I promised to show the dean the new piggeries.’

‘As if the dean would not prefer seeing Firchester church!’

‘Most certainly not! Did he not say he never tasted such pork in his life? I promised he should see my whole system of pig-feeding, from first to last. He will be disgusted, and I don’t wonder.’

‘He will *not* be disgusted; or if he is, he will not like to say so, which comes to the same thing,’ said Lady Gwendolen, in her most autocratic way. Then she explained the situation. Lord Arthur had got it into his head that Eleanor Syme was hoarse, and must resign her part. ‘If she does not sing, the Symes will be disappointed. Riposta is to decide this morning. I don’t know in the least what his decision will be—I can see he is hand and glove with Lord Arthur—but I do know that everything can be amicably arranged if you will take the Symes out of the way.’

So Mr. Trevor consented, and Lady Gwendolen's first strategic movement was accomplished.

She sat and watched her guests coming in to breakfast. First, Lady Florence Ferrers in a pretty morning-wrapper, arm-in-arm with the ordinary but affectionate young person, Blanche Trevor. Then Sir Wentworth, stiff and stately, his grey hair brushed to a fault. Lady Syme, pleasant, but looking anxious, came in next, with her daughter Mary. She had heard rumours that this cold of dear Nell's might prevent her singing; and if so, she anticipated a bad time with Sir Wentworth, who had only come (his faithful wife well knew) to have his parental vanity gratified to the full. Then the young clergyman, Robert Reed, came in, fair, but blushing and self-

conscious, as he invariably was. The dark Ximenez and the Marquis di Ferrara followed. Then came Lord and Lady Belmont and the dean. Mr. Trevor, at the end of the table, opened the post-bag and distributed the letters. But where was Lord Arthur? Where was Riposta? And 'that child,' as Lady Gwendolen mentally called Amy.

Smiling at each one as he or she got his or her letters, she had misgivings. She had her own private suspicions of his lordship and Riposta. It was quite a relief to her—she hardly knew why—when Amy came in.

Sweet, fair, young, brilliant. Those who were not examining their correspondence admired the fresh young beauty. The dean—who had been glancing round and con-

sidered the toast as near perfection as you could expect toast to be in a country-house—made room for her at his side.

‘I knew you were coming,’ he said quite paternally, glancing at her letters. ‘You have a large correspondence for so young a lady. Will you have a devilled kidney? I can assure you that the *chef* here devils kidneys inimitably.’

And while Amy shook her head, confused at the sight of three letters—although one at least was directed in a familiar handwriting—the dean thought her a sensible girl not to require a stimulus to her young healthy appetite, and took her share of the devilled kidneys upon his own plate.

Three letters!

‘She has a secret,’ thought Lady Gwendolen, as she saw her young guest stare at

her letters as if she were afraid of them. 'That girl has a secret.'

There was a buzz, a clattering, as the footmen went here and there. Amy had something upon her plate, but she knew not what. She only saw those three letters. She opened her father's first. It began 'My darling child,' and gave a minute account of the minutest incidents which had happened in Artro since her departure. But after she had read the letter twice, she knew as much about it as if she were in a dream. Then she slowly took up the next, in the bold, Greek-like characters penned by Dr. Andreos.

'Don't be a fool,' began the rough half-sheet. 'And I say this advisedly. You will see a lot of curious persons. Don't take them for granted. When they say

pleasant things, *they lie!* Life is not what it seems, and the unsuspecting had better go and hang themselves. One pang, and it is all over. You will know what I mean, if you live long enough. My own opinion is, you won't; and I can wish you nothing better than to be well out of a coil of mystery.'

That was all. This short letter was like a series of blows to Amy. She hardly realised what it was she was reading. The third letter was to be her climax. It was a peculiar-looking, battered letter. The poor unhappy soul who had written it had taken much pains to make it neat. But wind and weather had baffled him. It was a frayed, torn envelope that covered the loving words:

'Amy—dear Amy!—While I write the

word so dear, so far away, I feel inclined to give up and write no more. Amy, you have had my first letter, and you know the cruel conditions insisted on by your father and his severe adviser. I was to go. I am already hundreds of miles away from you, whom I adore. I am punished for my former scepticism. I used to feel contempt for "couples," "braces of lovers." God! I have learnt to know the most virulent phase of the love I laughed at! My life is almost a torture. I long for one glimpse of you with a horrible longing. Sometimes I long for death! Death, with forgetfulness—not without. Oh, Amy, pray for me—pray for me! God must love you—you who are so beautiful!—and I, so coarse—so common! What presumption it has been, my dreaming to be any-

thing to you but a faithful slave! Oh, my adored empress—my saint!—pray—pray for me——’ The final sentences were blotted and illegible.

While Amy was reading her passionate love-letter, her ears burning, the rest went on talking and breakfasting. Miss Norman had sent her maid, Masham, to tell Lady Gwendolen that her violent face-ache would keep her in her room.

There only remained Lord Arthur, Riposta, and Eleanor Syme to complete the house-party, thought Lady Gwendolen, as she glanced at the vacant places.

Riposta entered, bowing and smiling, shaking hands here, and nodding there. Almost immediately after, Lord Arthur and Eleanor Syme came in, in confidential conversation.

That promised well: Lady Gwendolen gave a little sigh of relief. Eleanor looked quite herself. Lord Arthur devoted himself to her. Whenever she gave a little cough, he bit his lip and looked anxiously at Lady Gwendolen.

As they were all rising from table—Lady Gwendolen on the alert to arrange the excursion to Firchester—he called out:

‘Riposta—can Miss Syme and I try our duets?’

Then he asked his hostess if they might go to her boudoir.

‘Certainly,’ said Lady Gwendolen, thinking that after all the little musical hitch had arranged itself, and following her guests into the Oak-room in a more buoyant humour.

The dean's face fell somewhat at the postponement of his visit to the piggeries. He had seen Firchester and its archæological remains some years back, he said, and thought nothing of them.

Sir Wentworth thereupon briskly approved the plan.

‘I always wish Lady Syme and my daughters to enlarge their minds,’ he somewhat pompously said, as he stood, very straight, and head thrown back, his eye-glass between his finger and thumb—his well-known attitude when speaking in the House. ‘There is nothing better calculated to fix historical periods in our memories than a careful inspection of such relics as those you mention, Lady Gwendolen.’

Upon which, his obedient wife, the good Lady Syme, eagerly expressed her anxiety

to see the bits of chipped pavement, noseless old statues, and heaps of curiously-shaped stones, supposed by learned judges to be 'flint implements,' which constituted the treasure hidden in the crypt of Fitches-ter church.

'My dear, I really do not care for these things; but we must try and keep matters smooth between your dear papa and the dean,' she confidentially said later on to her daughter Mary, as they were putting on their bonnets.

'I do not care for the dean, myself; I think him greedier than one in his sacred position should be. But this is not the reason papa disapproves of him. He does not think a priest should accept Church dignities obtained through his marriage.'

(Which, interpreted, meant that Sir

Wentworth Syme, having known and looked considerably down upon 'young Jakes' when he was a poor sizar and Sir Wentworth himself was a rich undergraduate, had resented the sizar's marriage with his noble pupil's sister, and his consequent rapid rise in the Church. In fact, should the dean become a Bishop with a seat in the Upper House, Sir Wentworth felt that never again could he conscientiously repeat a certain sentence in the Lord's Prayer.)

Not only were Lady Syme and her daughter acquiescent—Lady Belmont, as soon as she heard that the marquis would not be of the party, was delighted at the idea of an excursion which would include little Lord Robert; and the Hon. Mrs. Jakes was still infatuated with her reverend hus-

band, whom she loved all the more because her only rival was that portion of his being alluded to by the great St. Paul when he advised a certain disciple to 'drink a little wine' for its preservation in health.

Lady Gwendolen's party was complete. She went off to her husband's room, nodded amiably to the bailiff, who was just coming out, and said :


'Everything is most charmingly arranged, my love. The brake will be at the door directly. You will have quite a delightful day.'

'If you think it so delightful, why on earth don't you go yourself?' said Mr. Trevor, with a sudden burst of irritability. It was almost pardonable. He had just heard that his favourite prize Alderney cow had calved. Now, he desired to inspect

that Alderney calf with a longing more akin to the desire of a father to behold his firstborn than the longing of the same father to see—say his eleventh or twelfth infant.

But he immediately repented, and said something civil. Mr. Trevor was not afraid of his clever and nobly born wife. Not at all. He only felt that it behoved him invariably to treat her with the respectful deference due to her extraordinary merits.

The 'canoe,' a lightly built *chef-d'œuvre* in the way of shallow brakes, was at the door. The four horses pawed the gravel impatiently. The stolid coachman sat solemnly staring before him, as if he sat at the great table in the servants' hall opposite a peck loaf and a Stilton cheese. A brisk footman, neat from hat-top to



boot-toe, was at the tiny door, on the alert.

The sweet spring breeze stirred the fan-like leaves of the chestnuts. The grey stone house seemed to stand among the grassy fields, the leafy woods—lofty, still, like a stately monument in a rural churchyard. There were cabal, intrigue, grief, hope, fear, and other stormy human passions at work within its massive walls, yet affecting them as little from within as the bird-carollings, sheep-bleatings, insect-buzzings, bullock-lowings, and cock-crowings affected them from without.

Lady Gwendolen stood shading her eyes with her slim hand as the party packed into the brake—the elderly ladies first; then beautiful Lady Belmont, in a dove-grey spring cloak, smiling at her husband, who

strolled round to talk to his excited little son, who sat by his mother, violently squeezing her hand ; then the dean and Sir Wentworth, and, quite at the end of the vehicle, the Reverend Robert Reed.

‘Reed will be a drop of oil on the water,’ thought Lady Gwendolen, as the four horses dashed off along the newly gravelled carriage-road under the chestnuts. ‘They will be as spiteful to one another, those men will, as monkeys quarrelling over a handful of nuts ; at least until after luncheon.’ (Lady Gwendolen had given her Hugh minute and subtle directions on the subject of the luncheon to be ordered for the party at the Old Bull Inn, whose culinary possibilities she had made it her business to know through and through.) ‘But that young Reed is as unselfishly *rusé* as a

woman,' she added. 'He never offends anyone.'

Then the park-gate clanged, the trotting of the team was heard pattering on the highroad, Lady Gwendolen said something pleasant to Lord Belmont, and went indoors to see after the practising party.

As she went along the corridor to her room, she expected to hear music. She only heard speaking voices. Opening the door of her white boudoir, she saw Lord Arthur and Riposta seemingly in altercation, while Miss Syme stood aloof, evidently offended.

'Ah! here is Lady Gwendolen,' said Lord Arthur. 'You shall give the casting-vote, Lady Gwendolen. Riposta says that it will injure Miss Syme's voice if she sings until her hoarseness has disappeared. I

say it will not. I cannot hear the hoarseness myself. I do not see how we are to rehearse without the principal voice. The "Rose Queen" without the Rose Queen herself—it is absurd! We shall have a *fiasco* on the night, and I do not intend to be associated with a *fiasco*. Nor do I care for my operetta to be done without Miss Syme—that is the fact. I think the whole thing had better be given up.' And he lounged discontentedly to the window, and looked out as if he were desperately annoyed.

Riposta had at once recognised Lord Arthur's tactics, which were that he, Lord Arthur, should profess to want Miss Syme for his Rose Queen, while Riposta should firmly oppose her singing.

'Well, milady, what *you* say?' asked the scapegoat Riposta.

Lady Gwendolen, puzzled, scarcely understood the situation. She was in a dilemma, which was unexpectedly solved by Eleanor Syme herself.

Eleanor was very angry with Riposta, but believed in him, and believed he spoke truly when he said she might lose her voice for good if it were used just now. She was equally pleased with Lord Arthur for 'making such a fuss about it,' and her pleasure made her feel generous.

'My dear Lady Gwendolen, I give it up,' she said magnanimously.

Lord Arthur turned round and expostulated, and spoke quite angrily to Riposta. But the warmer he grew, the more firmly Eleanor Syme held her ground.

'There will not be the slightest difficulty to find a substitute. Of course, the music

is charming, but it is very easy,' she said.

Upon which Lord Arthur stalked off, seemingly in a huff. But as he hastened to the other wing of the house, he smiled. Safely out of sight and earshot, he pencilled a message to Amy :

'Miss Syme has declined her part. I hope you will take it. Please come to Lady Gwendolen's boudoir in half an hour.'

Masham solemnly conveyed the note to Amy, who was sitting by her aunt's bedside. Miss Norman, who had probably caught cold during her journey from Artro to Ilkley, had her head wrapped in flannel, and was moaning and groaning. Still, she forgot to groan when Masham, the im-

maculate grey-haired attendant of unimpeachable spinsterhood, brought the twisted note, gingerly held at a distance, as if its proper destiny were the dusthole and oblivion, and delivered it to Amy with solemn but respectful disapproval.

Miss Norman noticed that Amy blushed as she read the note. Not only blushed, but gave a soft little laugh.

‘What is that?’ asked her aunt sharply.
‘Let me see it.’

Holding her flannel wraps close to her face, she grunted with pain. Still, she looked consoled.

‘What nonsense!’ she said. ‘How stupid these young men are! They think because a girl is good-looking she can do anything. Of course you cannot sing the part.’

•

‘He says I can,’ burst out Amy.

‘*He*—and who may *he* be?’

‘Lord Arthur,’ said Amy.

Then she told her aunt the occurrences of yesterday and to-day, so frankly, so innocently, that Miss Norman was gratified.

While her niece talked, she thought: what a way out of Amy’s unsuitable engagement! What a triumph for herself and her friend Gwen, if she could take Amy back to Artro as the future Marchioness of Doume (because, of course, everyone knew the sickly elder brother, Lord Helfont, could not live).

‘Oh, you children!—you and Lord Arthur; one seems as much of a baby as the other,’ she said good-humouredly. ‘He is very enthusiastic. But I suppose he

really thinks you can sing the part, or he would not bother about it. I honestly like the young man: there is something so open, so chivalrous in his manners; and those big eyes of his are so thoroughly truthful. What a nuisance that I have this horrid face-ache, and can't get up!

Miss Norman leant back on her pillows and thought. It was not nice that Amy should practise with Lord Arthur without her chaperonage. But Gwen always saw to the proprieties. What a consolation that was to a chaperon at Ilkley Hall!

A slight demur—then Amy went to join Lord Arthur in the white boudoir, with her aunt's sanction.

He was alone. He received her triumphantly. But she felt suddenly shy. His manner was too proprietary, almost

too familiar. Then Edward's letter was in her pocket. Lord Arthur saw the slight change: nor had Amy's abstraction as she read her letters at the breakfast-table escaped him.

'She vacillates, is under each passing influence,' he thought. 'If she is to be influenced, she must be taken by storm, at once.'

He went to the hearth, stirred the burning logs with Lady Gwendolen's dainty little tongs, then told her of the scene there had just been, and how Miss Syme had 'thrown up the part.'

'It is so much better to be thoroughly off with the old love before you are on with the new—don't you think so, Miss Norman?' ('Hulloa!' he thought, as a sudden bloom rushed to Amy's cheeks, 'this child is not

such a child, after all. There is a man in the case.')

'I always fancy that one's whole energies should be given to a thing,' he went on nonchalantly, as he arranged Amy's part, and sitting down at the piano, ran his fingers over the keys. 'I cannot understand those people who paint, and compose, and write verses, and act, all in the same day. I used to paint, but when I turned to music I gave it up. I was off with the old love, you see, before I was on with the new. I advise you to be the same.'

What could he mean ?

'I don't understand you,' said Amy, her hand involuntarily seeking her pocket.

Had he heard—had he seen ?

'I have an idea you feel—well, suppose we call it homesick—since you received

your letters this morning. That is not a good working humour, you know.'

Amy protested—too much. He shook his head at her with an incredulous smile.

'You mean to tell me there was not something in one of those letters that made you regret your promise to help me? Ah, I see! You cannot deny it! I shall ask you a question, Miss Norman, and you will have to answer it.' Then he wheeled round, and looking her full in the face, folded his arms, and said, with mock solemnity, '*Who is he?*'

'What he? All my letters this morning were from men, as it happens,' said Amy, slightly recovering from her confusion. 'One was from my father.'

'Naturally,' said Lord Arthur, playing a

little guitar-like accompaniment with his left hand, but still keeping his eyes fixed upon Amy. 'But there remain two to be accounted for. You have no brothers.'

'One was from Dr. Andreos,' said Amy, not noticing the curious position of being catechized on purely private matters by one who should be but a stranger, but who, though she did not know it herself, had already a certain power over her.

'And the third? You, of course, have kept the *bonne bouche* for the last.'

'The other letter was also — from a doctor.'

'What! *Two* physicians in attendance? To look at you, it does not seem as if that were necessary. You are as rosy as — as——'

‘Don’t!’ interrupted Amy. ‘He is not my doctor; at least, he was—but now—oh, don’t look at me like that! Well, if you must know, I am engaged to be married to him,’ she said, with a little defiant attempt at dignity which was almost comical. ‘How dare you laugh! There is nothing at all laughable in the affair. Poor fellow! He is gone away with your brother for months—perhaps years——’

‘*What!*’ Lord Arthur jumped up. ‘Miss Norman, you are joking! You can’t mean that—that—clumsy, boorish medical student fellow that went away with Helfont? You *must* be joking—no; you are not! Good heavens! what can your father and your aunt be thinking about? Come, you must tell me the rights of this preposterous

affair before we go any farther. I am a great deal too interested in you to see you the victim of unscrupulous schemes.'

There was a certain power in his vehemence which subdued, subjugated the girl. She allowed him to place her in one of Lady Gwendolen's snug little holland-covered easy-chairs by the fireside. She meekly sat there as he half-crouched, half-lounged at her feet.

As the flames shot coloured gleams upon his golden hair, upon the diamonds on his delicate white hands, upon his pale Greek features and lurid blue eyes, she felt a mingled fear and admiration. More even than this. A suggestion of instinctive terror, which made her think of *escape*. Escape from what or from whom she could not have told.

‘Now, tell me everything,’ said Lord Arthur peremptorily.

Then he questioned her as closely as the most subtle cross-examining counsel or the most ruthless priestly confessor might have done. He thought to have out the whole love-story. But Amy had begun to recognise how ugly her love-episode was.

She sat twisting her fingers, and her little ears growing red as twin rosebuds, as she underwent what was actually torture to her. Lord Arthur little dreamt *why* she winced and almost struggled as he tried to get her confession, how she thought of her conduct in detail, and almost loathed herself, and Edward too, for the whole sequence of events, from the stolen kiss by the roadside to the bitter, passionate parting.

‘She cares no more for the fellow than

for old Trevor,' thought Lord Arthur, already calculating his chances.

Then he made a somewhat bold venture.

'I should like to see that *letter* of his, Miss Norman,' he insinuatingly said, as if it were quite a reasonable and ordinary request. 'One can' judge so much better, if one has a glimpse behind the scenes.' Then he talked about counsel—how a man always gave up his most private documents to his lawyer. 'Otherwise, advice would be worth nothing at all,' he said, holding out his hand for Edward's letter.

Amy paused a moment. She felt disgusted with herself—too angry with her own precipitate folly to see whither she was drifting, or how strange was the position. She was giving her sacred confidences to a man she barely knew and but vaguely ad-

mired. The fact was, that her sudden removal from her seclusion, her lonely dreamy life, had led to a state of feeling which was a species of intoxication. She neither realised her impressions, nor knew rightly what she did.

She stared for a moment at Lord Arthur, scarcely understanding what he asked. Suddenly, she felt rather than understood that he had actually dared to ask to read poor Edward's sad, almost wild, letter. In a panic she started up, drew her letters from her pocket, and dropped them into the heart of the glowing wood fire. In a moment her love-letter was a quivering flake of ash, that went fluttering up the chimney among the sparks, carried above by the pale column of blue smoke.

'There !' she said, almost defiantly.

Lord Arthur smiled.

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Perhaps it would be better for a good many of us, Miss Norman, if we had the courage to imitate you in regard to our daily correspondence. Well, it seems to me that we are wasting time——’

‘I am ready to practise,’ said Amy coldly, moving towards the piano.

Evidently he had gone too far, even with this impressionable, excitable girl. He at once changed his manner. He became a patient, if an exacting teacher. He taught, he explained, he spared no pains. After a morning of sheer hard work, Amy found herself, when the second luncheon-bell rang, tired, somewhat breathless—as if she had ridden hard at racing speed—but conscious that the worst of her work was over.

‘You will *do*,’ said Lord Arthur. ‘Now, after luncheon you and your maid and I must have a talk. I shall be off to-night about your costumes, and shall be back to-morrow morning in time for the rehearsal. Two hours’ practice with Riposta will get you ready for that. Then to-morrow, after rehearsal, he and I and you and Lady Belmont will work again. (Mary Syme is sure not to sing. We shall have the advantage of Lady Belmont.) Next day, second rehearsal. Then the great Saturday night—the performance.’

Amy was ‘in for it’ now. She felt half fearful, half elated, and withal curiously happy. She ran into her aunt’s room with sparkling eyes and pink cheeks.

‘Dr. Andreos is clever, wonderful, and all that,’ she said, as she rapidly tidied her

hair at her aunt's glass. 'But his cleverness seems so inaccessible to us ordinary mortals—like the rocky side of old Cader Idris. Lord Arthur seems able to come down with his cleverness in his hands, and give a little bit to one, and a little bit to another. "Shall I be able to do it?" Don't fear. Lord Arthur would not let me, if he did not know I could.'

Then she danced up to her aunt, who was still in bed, kissed her, and danced out.

'Stranger things have happened,' contentedly mused Miss Norman, after her niece shut the door somewhat impetuously.

And she continued a whole train of castle-building thought till Masham brought her her luncheon of fricasseed chicken and champagne.

Even the staid Masham enjoyed a little

gossip, and had been known to admit a breath of mild scandal within a mile of her virginal ears. She was quite ready to tell the little inner incidents of the house-keeper's room.

‘Harman? Mrs. Harman was a very pleasant person, and sensible, as far as it went. She made rather too much fuss over Miss Amy; but then, you see, she had been her nurse, and it was to be expected, like. Lord Arthur’s valet? A most proper, religious-minded man. No fooling about with them young housemaids, as *some* did about the place. Oh dear no! Not that he stuck himself up, as it were, or preached. He was only that quiet you could talk as safe before him as you could before that big tom-cat that was always getting under your feet when you went

into Mrs. Simmonds' (the housekeeper's) room. The fact of the matter being, ma'am, that he is what you call superior,' went on Masham, while her lady cautiously munched her chicken. 'Do he talk about poor Lord Helfont? Well, not much, except to say as Lord Arthur sat up night after night with his brother till he looked like a ghost. But I *do* gather as the household thinks as he can't live, and won't be by no means sorry if Lord Arthur *do* get to be the heir; he's such a liberal, feeling gentleman. Engaged? He did say as the ladies were mad after his lordship—shame to 'em; but he don't seem to take no notice of none of 'em. He seems wrapped up in his music, like. "He lives in another spear, as one may say, Mrs. Masham," ses his gentleman to me. At which, ma'am, I says with all

deference to his lordship, that I don't by no means envy him his other spear. I find *one* spear quite enough for me, just at present, until the right time comes to shut me up and giv' me Christian burial. Is it to be the brown velvet, ma'am, or the grey satting ?

Miss Norman, fortified by her chicken and champagne, and by no means disconcerted by the chatter of her maid, forgot her neuralgia, and joined the party downstairs.

Meanwhile, Lady Gwendolen had been, as she termed it, 'smoothing sharp corners.'

After Eleanor Syme's magnanimous behaviour, Lady Gwendolen could not make enough of her. She took her into the warmest room in the house, 'the little library'; coaxed, petted, and approved her. Something, she felt, must be done for

Eleanor Syme—and that at once. Fortunately it came out that Eleanor Syme had danced many times with the Marquis di Ferrara at one of the first dances of the season. Lady Gwendolen's busy mind sprang upon and seized the bit of information. Still, she changed the subject of conversation. She administered beef-tea and Burgundy to the pretty Eleanor, found her a book, excited her curiosity as to its contents, insisted upon her lying full-length upon the soft velvet sofa, and went off—to find the marquis.

‘Oh, *there* you are,’ she said, in a sort of coquettish pleasant way which still gave her a flavour of agreeable feminine youth, in spite of her middle-aged caps and gowns, as she peeped into the billiard-room and saw Lord Belmont and Ximenez (who was

a good player) busy at the big table in their shirt-sleeves, while the marquis was lounging on the divan, discontentedly watching the game.

‘How very early for you gentlemen to shut yourselves up in this gloomy room! But pray don’t disturb yourselves; marquis, have you been through the conservatories? No? Oh, *do* come! I want your advice. Now, this is very kind of you, really, to come so readily with an old person like myself,’ she said, smiling back at him over her shoulder as she tripped downstairs to the garden entrance. ‘You Southern gentlemen are examples of chivalry.’

Then she chatted away, interweaving her speech with little compliments, as they went into the glass-houses.

The long conservatory, with the central

glass cupola, was ablaze with bloom. The warm, sunlit air reeked with perfume. The little marquis liked the beautiful. He had the innocently sensuous nature that springs up under a Southern sky. Then these flowers, these scents were new. The gigantic white rose-tree, twenty years old, that flung its branches about under the transparent roof, shedding big fair round blossoms as a wintry cloud breaks into snowflakes, excited him, like an intoxicant. The groups of graceful purple fuchsias, the crimson geraniums, the placid white lilies—each had some special charm : and there was a delicacy about these Northern flowers as different from the wild profusion of Southern blossom, as fair Northern girls differed from the dark, flashing-eyed women of his own clime.

He said this—to Lady Gwendolen. It was just the sort of speech she wanted from him. She spoke admiringly of the various girl guests, and with affectionate pity of Eleanor Syme.

‘There is something about that dear girl I cannot quite understand,’ she said confidentially. ‘She is not an envious girl, of that I am perfectly sure. But I believe she grudged that nice child, Amy Norman, that bouquet Lady Belmont gave her. She could not forget it. She was examining the flowers and looking at it all the time in the drawing-room after dinner. She is so dull to-day, poor child!’

Then she went on telling the marquis how Eleanor had given up her part.

‘It is all nonsense about a cold. The girl is unhappy. Now, I am going to make

her a bouquet as like Lady Belmont's as possible, and you must help me by telling me the flowers.'

Lady Gwendolen snipped off a delicate snowy blossom here, a fair white rosebud there, seemingly unconscious that the marquis's brown face flushed to a coppery red, although she knew as well that he was blushing as she knew the cause of the blush.

'It is not a difficult task to persuade the little coxcomb that every woman who looks at him is in love with him,' she thought, as she was seemingly absorbed in cutting flowers at his suggestion, but was inwardly indulging in a certain contemptuous pity for this item in the great population of 'necessary evils.'

'He will offer to present the bouquet,' she thought.

And she was not wrong. As soon as Lady Gwendolen and the head gardener had composed the white nosegay, which was a floral impromptu poem in its way, the marquis, in a distant but respectful manner—as he might have proposed somewhat to Royalty—offered to be the carrier of the offering to the charming young lady for whom it had been concocted.

Lady Gwendolen affected to hesitate, but finally consented.

‘*That* is in train,’ she thought, twirling her garden-scissors as she watched the marquis hurrying off across the lawn. ‘I believe it may—if it goes on favourably—end in a match,’ concluded Lady Gwendolen, dealing with Love as a mental fever, in which idea she was perhaps not entirely wrong.

The marquis, gently opening the door of 'the little library,' saw a lovely picture.

The fair, pretty Eleanor had fallen asleep. Her book had tumbled upon the floor. Her classic profile was whitely defined against the dark-green velvet background of the huge sofa.

The marquis's heart beat. He stood gazing admiringly at the beautiful English girl. Then he felt that to stare any longer was dishonest, dishonourable. He closed the door with a bang.

'That will wake her,' he thought, as he stood outside, all his pulses drumming an alarum. Then he coughed loudly several times ; then he opened the door again.

Eleanor was sitting up, picking up her book, flushed, and her prettiness enhanced by the dreaminess of recent sleep.

The marquis ceremoniously presented his bouquet.

‘What was the matter with the man?’ thought the sensible, matter-of-fact Miss Syme. Yesterday it was all Lady Belmont. To-day he gazed at her with his languishing black eyes as if he could sigh and die at her feet! Was it pique? No, there was that spurious reality about it that belonged by right to the fleeting fancies of foreigners.

Eleanor would have left her suddenly new admirer then and there, but for an idea. Well-brought-up, refined young lady that she was, she had instincts. One instinct had urged her to become Lady Arthur Beville. The Marchioness of Doume was a title that she felt would be suitable to her. This hitch in the operetta arrangements was cutting the ground from under her feet.

But there was nothing more calculated to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion, when a man was playing fast and loose with you, she thought, than suddenly to spring another admirer upon him.

So she blushing, smilingly accepted the bouquet; and as she cast down her eyes in seeming confusion, the marquis felt himself desperately, hopelessly in love.

‘If I live, she shall be Marchesa di Ferrara,’ thought he passionately, as he had thought on similar occasions—perhaps ninety-nine times—before.

Would this experience close his butterfly life?

Cupid, or Puck, or whatever the love-master may be called, left the Marquis di Ferrara alone. The marquis hovered so fantastically from flower to flower, and so

cleverly omitted to poise or perch upon any, that this was not to be wondered at. It is not usual to treat past-masters as pupils.





CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW LOVE.

WHILE Lady Gwendolen had been scheming, in a refined, unobtrusive way, the Firchester party had gone through their day's sight-seeing good-temperedly, and were driving rapidly home along the highroad, just as the brougham containing Lord Arthur appeared at the park-gates on its way to the station.

‘I have done well to leave them for a night,’ he thought, as he leant back in a comfortable corner of his compartment, his eyes darkly watching the flying landscape

as the five o'clock express dashed towards London. 'Those women will at least have made up their minds whether they are going to be agreeable or the reverse, by the time I return. And *she* will be more in love to-morrow than she is to-day. Nothing like missing me for a few hours.'

Lord Arthur was not by any means unpractised in the art of making women fall in love with him ; and he often boasted to himself that he believed he could bring about these miserable results as quickly—well, as most men who made the capture of feminine hearts a special study.

He was not wrong about Amy. She did miss him. There was a gay dinner. The dean sat at her right ; the marquis was seated at her left, paying marked attention to Miss Syme, who looked pretty and con-

sumptive, in a pale-blue cashmere dress, and who leant back wearily in her chair and coughed now and then. But Amy only saw the marquis's right ear and his shoulder most of the time ; and the dean and her aunt, his neighbour, were engaged in an animated discussion upon the ice-creams of Europe, and their relative merits ; so she was left to her own thoughts. The band played a dreamy waltz with a melancholy melody. First, she thought of Edward, and of that love-letter ; then, with a peculiar bitterness, she compared Edward, the writer of that love-letter, with Edward the man—*the man who loved his word better than he loved her*. Ah ! though she would have denied it till she had no voice left to deny with, the fact was, that she was jealous of Edward's sense of honour.

In his first letter to her, where he told her of the promises he had given to her father and Dr. Andreos, and how he had left her to fulfil them against his wish and inclination—he had quoted the lines :

‘I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,’

and had appealed to her, asking whether she could possibly love a man who disgraced himself—even for her sake? And she had crumpled up the letter, and had thrown it into the fire, angrier with him than ever, saying passionately to herself :

‘He loves himself much more than he loves me, if indeed he cares about me at all.’

She understood the incoherent love-letter far better. But she had burnt that also. As she recollected the scene, she trembled just a little.

‘Lord Arthur would stop for *nothing*,’ she thought, almost with pride, as if he already belonged to her in some way. ‘If he loved anyone, it would be with a strong love that would come leaping obstacles or dashing them aside like a mountain torrent. It would bear no interference ; it would destroy any barrier, carry everything before it.’

Honour, peace, justice, anything ! That was the sort of ‘love’ Amy understood.

‘How clever he is !—there is something magnetic about him,’ she thought, looking round.

Sound, colour, light, music : the great dining-room presented a brilliant scene ; yet to her it was bare, dreary as a dim-lighted empty barn.

Riposta, from an opposite corner, watched the discontented droop of the pretty lips,

the dreamy abstracted look of Amy's hazel eyes, usually so brightly clear—and interpreted these signs rightly.

Following the ladies as soon as he could, he found them chattering over their coffee in the red drawing-room—all except Amy. She had retreated to the corner where she was sitting when Lord Arthur came to her, like Apollo himself, and imperiously annexed her, as it seemed to her excited fancy. She had found the same book she was looking at when he came. It was open on her lap. Riposta, stepping into the room with an airy apology, saw Amy at once, but was not so foolish as to go to her there and then. He hovered about Lady Gwendolen. He hung almost affectionately over Eleanor Syme, only retreating discreetly at the entrance of the marquis. Even then he had much to

say to each of the other ladies before he went over to Amy, remarking :

‘ Oh, there you are, mademoiselle !’ in a surprised tone, as if he had come across a mushroom growing out of the red carpet.

‘ Yes,’ said Amy. And she seemed to glide up from her seat like a ghost.

Riposta was connected with Lord Arthur in her imagination. So, as she stood there, tall, slim, she fixed her great eyes upon the little dark, smiling, bald-headed Italian with a sweet longing gaze, which he afterwards told himself ‘ went into that marrow which is the middle of my bones.’

‘ Mademoiselle is not—not cheerful, as we say in Engleesh,’ said the sprightly little musician. ‘ What it is ? Can I do nothink ?’

Amy explained—all the while looking at

him with that new, sad longing—that she was somewhat nervous about what she had undertaken.

‘*He* says I can do it,’ she said, little dreaming how she was betraying herself by the ‘he,’ and by the blush and downcast glance as she spoke; ‘but then, I am sure he is so kind. He does not hear my faults. He thinks me so much cleverer than I am.’

With one mental ejaculation of pity for this poor little pretty girl, with one remorseful regret that he should be party to Lord Arthur’s plans (for Riposta, bound to Lord Arthur as his most important patron, had made his own estimate of him as a man), the Italian stood by Amy, and made himself agreeable.

Of course she was perfectly able to take the part! Lord Arthur was not only satis-

fied with her singing ; he was enthusiastic ! She must not be so modest. Of course, modesty in a beautiful young lady was like a saint's *aureole*. Only there were times and seasons when it was right to lay aside this spiritual crown of sweet humility. This was one of them, etc., etc. But if it would be of any assistance to Miss Amy, he would be so glad to help her for an hour or two now, etc., etc.

Amy sprang up and accepted Riposta's offer on the spot. She went over to Lady Gwendolen, got a warm 'Certainly, my dear ; anything you like,' in answer to her request for permission ; then she and Riposta went off to Lady Gwendolen's boudoir.

She gave a sigh of pleasure when she got into the room. Lord Arthur's presence

seemed lingering there, as a perfume. She lighted the candles gaily. She smiled at Riposta, who, if not the rose itself, lived near it. Then she sang so sweetly, with such tender, innocent passion, that the impressionable Italian felt compunction 'stab him to the heart,' as he declared to himself afterwards.

This gifted, beautiful creature must not be sacrificed to an unscrupulous fellow like that. Even were he royal, it would be a shame! Riposta was quite valiant in the candlelight, when a mild after-dinner content blended life's colours and softened the sharp outlines of actual struggle.

Next morning, in the cold, before breakfast, he took a different view of things.

'We poor beggars, who have to crawl at the feet of the rich, cannot afford to be

scrupulous,' he bitterly assured himself. 'She is sweet, pretty, clever. But she must take her chance.'

Nevertheless, his determination 'not to interfere one way or another' did not conduce to preserve Riposta's natural buoyancy. He sat through breakfast, looking thunderclouds. He could have done nothing better for the general well-being. The presence of *very* bad temper, no matter whom the generator, has often a distinctly beneficial effect upon the tempers of the surrounding individuals.

Everyone seemed cheerful, with one exception—Miss Norman. She had made an effort, although her neuralgia had troubled her during the night, and she had 'come down to breakfast.' She had appeared, genial and happy, and had commenced a

good solid breakfast, when Mr. Trevor distributed the morning's letters.

Among hers were two which puzzled and disturbed her.

One was from her brother. It was civil ; and mentioned Lady Gwendolen, Mr. Trevor, and Ilkley Hall, with evident desire to be appreciative. But the gist of the three pages was that the sooner Miss Norman brought Amy home the better.

The other was from Dr. Andreos. 'His handwriting is as crooked as his body,' scornfully thought Miss Norman, adding to herself, as she finished the doctor's note, 'but neither is so crooked as his miserable mind. And to think of his impertinence—daring to write to *me* like that !'

The letter was certainly peremptory in tone.

‘DEAR MISS NORMAN,

‘I am a plain-spoken man, and prefer truth. Mr. Norman does not choose to give reasons for his demand that you bring Amy back to Artro immediately, if possible. But I give you my reason. There is a person among Lady Gwendolen Trevor’s invited guests who is not a desirable acquaintance for your niece. Should the name of this person be required, I am prepared to give it, privately, to yourself or to Lady Gwendolen. Meanwhile, be so good as to hasten your departure, for it would place Amy in an undignified position were I or her father to appear and remove her.

‘Believe me,

‘Faithfully yours,

‘ANDREOS.’

‘“Andreos,” indeed!’ sneered Miss Norman. ‘As if he were a peer of the realm! The conceit of the hunchbacked creature!’

Her eyes grew bright; portly though she was, she looked quite youthful in her excited wrath.

Her ‘dear Gwen’ saw there was some fresh complication, so Miss Norman had no difficulty in procuring a private interview. Lady Gwendolen read both letters, then suddenly said:

‘That hunchbacked doctor is—how old?’

‘Oh, not very. I should say somewhere about thirty-five or forty.’

‘And you said his face and head were—not unpleasant?’

‘To hear my brother and Amy talk, you would imagine him an Adonis.’

‘I thought so,’ said Lady Gwendolen, a

little smile curling about the corners of her firm lips. 'Here are your letters, my dear; thanks for letting me see them. In your place, I should temporise, and by no means alter my plans. It is only a man's selfish jealousy. I know them!'

'John—jealous?'

Miss Norman opened her eyes.

'I don't mean Mr. Norman; the hunch-back. From what you told me, long ago, I had an idea that this deformed doctor had one of those strange passions for your niece which are peculiar to those unfortunate objects. These letters confirm that idea. It is your duty not to allow his insane notion to interfere with the dear child's prospects.'

'That creature—and Amy! Oh, my dear Gwen! it is too disgusting—too repulsive!'

Miss Norman had recourse to her smelling-salts. But better than smelling-salts as a reviver was the little talk which followed.

Lady Gwendolen felt convinced, she told her dear friend Prudence, that this pretty, childish Amy had made a great conquest. Lord Arthur Beville was completely fascinated. Of course, were he only Lord Arthur Beville, second son of the Marquis of Doume, it would scarcely rank as a conquest where such a girl, with such a fortune, was concerned. But it was well known in society that under no circumstances whatever could his elder brother, Lord Helfont, live, therefore that Lord Arthur was virtually heir to the marquise.

‘Poor old Lord Doume cannot possibly last long. He has been paralysed so many

years. My dear, it is the most fortunate thing that could have happened for the two young people ! Such a suitable match !

Miss Norman left her friend in high spirits, and wrote two diplomatic letters, according to Lady Gwendolen's pencilled suggestions.

Then she went to find her niece. Amy was practising with Lady Belmont—who was after all to take the part allotted to Miss Syme—and with Ximenez.

They were in the red drawing-room. The three voices blended beautifully. Miss Norman stood outside, listening, thinking. The Marchioness of Doume ! Her niece ! If John only knew ! But Gwen had insisted upon no hint of the state of affairs being given to Mr. Norman.

‘If you do, we shall have that doctor down upon us, my dear. And although I

have hitherto managed to hold my own against ordinary mortals, I have had no experience with monsters.'

(Under this dreadful term did Lady Gwendolen classify the celebrated chemist.)

As Miss Norman opened the door, heard Amy laugh, and saw the two beautiful women standing against the crimson curtains on either side of the chattering Riposta, with the darkly handsome Ximenez standing with a certain dignified modesty in the background, she thought 'marchioness and countess'—and imagined those two in gorgeous court-dresses, their bare shoulders white as their feathers and lappets, sitting side by side, amid billows of silk and lace; and opposite, Lord Belmont, and he who was now Lord Arthur, but might so soon be Lord Doume.

And this magnificent castle in the air might solidify if it were not for that Dr. Andreos!

‘I consider my horror of poisons an instinct,’ thought Miss Norman, as she swept towards the group at the piano. ‘This Andreos only made the reputation he dares and presumes upon by meddling with poisons. Who knows that he may not be a poisoner himself?’

Here the clock struck twelve. Riposta stopped short and took out his watch.

‘The clock be too fast,’ he said; ‘ah! but my clock say same ting. Milord ’ave missed de train.’

END OF VOL. II.

